

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

FALL 2002
Volume 14, No. 3



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EDITORIAL

Like the European Union ?

The month of August saw the beginning of heated rhetoric between Russia and Belarus. After years of promoting a brotherly Pan-Slavic union between the neighboring countries, Belarusian President Lukashenka finally got his answer from Russia's President Putin.

This answer was brutally brief. Putin declared the proposed union of equals to be "legalistic nonsense", suggesting instead the incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Federation. Belarus' regions would then have rights equal to Russia's other regions, under Russian constitution, Russian President and with Russian currency.

The response from Belarus was immediate and universally against such annexation. Lukashenka, his governmental apparatus and the democratic opposition were surprisingly united in declaring: Belarus will not give up its sovereignty! The reaction in Russia, on the other hand, was almost totally in support of Putin's proposal.

President Putin followed up with a written proposal, offering the following three possible integration scenarios: a full merger of Belarus into Russian Federation, a suprastate formation like the European Union, or unification on the basis of a treaty, that was signed by Lukashenka and Yeltsin in 1999.

Let us review the likelihood of these scenarios to actually materialize.

The last scenario, the union of equals, has been effectively buried by Putin's view of it as "legalistic nonsense". It stands a little chance of being adopted in its current version.

The first scenario – that of physical incorporation of Belarus into Russia is highly unlikely in that it may raise highly negative worldwide reaction with cries of Anschluss and the like.

Thus the scenario of "something like the European Union" will be the main focus of this article. The key elements of the gradual development of EU will be reviewed and compared to their likely Russia-Belarus variants.

A major step toward the establishment of the European Union was the 1958 Treaty of Rome that was signed by France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries. All were at this point well-established democracies, with no single state being dominant.

The democratic experience of Belarus and Russia is respectively either totally non-existent, or at best limited. Also, Russia with its 150-million population will definitely dominate the 10-million Belarus.

Over the following three decades the European Community, the predecessor of EU, was joined by nine other European democracies. (Greece was not able to join until its democracy was re-established). All of them had well developed market economies prior to joining.

Belarus, on the other hand is an acknowledged totalitarian state with a state- controlled economy, and Russia – a fledgling market economy strongly influenced by a number of oligarchs. Looking around for additional potential members for this union, one fails to see any established democracies. Also, a question remains whether they will be joining voluntarily or will be pressured to do so, possibly resulting in a domino effect.

The 1991 Maastricht Treaty which led to the EU monetary union, was preceded by twenty years of consultations and cooperation between the members. EU entrance requirements were established. They included the elimination of tariffs, the streamlining of customs policies, as well as giving up some political authority. The European Union now has a Parliament and a number of executive bodies which operate essentially through consultations. There is no European President or Government and its member states are retaining their full sovereignty. Formal entry into EU was governed by strict convergence criteria whose goal was to establish similar fiscal guidelines among member states in controlling inflation and budgetary allocations, among others.

To establish any economic convergence criteria between the hyperinflation of Belarus and the relatively stable Russian currency is almost impossible to imagine. The interstate relations cannot expected to be on a consulting basis. They most likely will be directed from Moscow, with Belarus alone surrendering political authority to the Russian Government and President.

From Maastricht in 1991, it took a number of gradual steps and another ten years to establish a supranational European Central Bank and the new common currency – the euro.

Russia, on the other hand is calling for the single currency to be introduced in little over one year, with it being the Russian ruble, totally controlled by the Russian Central Bank from Moscow.

The foregoing comparisons make it abundantly clear that the Russia-Belarus union rather than being "like the European Union", will end up being radically "unlike the European Union". The question remains whether President Putin and his advisors are not aware of the historical development and operation of the European Union, or are cynically exploiting such lack of public awareness?

Is there any hope for a mutually beneficial cooperation between Belarus and Russia? Yes, as improbable as it may seem today, Belarus and Russia could independently over a period of years become stably democratic, financially responsible states with market economies, and as such enter the European Union as equal members, without requesting special powers or privileges.

Walter Stankievich, Publisher

November 2 - Remembrance Day (Dziady)

The day for commemorating ancestors with a special family meal, dating from pre-Christian times and later associated with Christianity's All Souls' Day. .

Since the Belarusian Declaration of Sovereignty in July, 1990, **Dziady** became an occasion for patriotic demonstrations emphasizing the victims and heroes of the historical past. Such observances were led by the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and other groups and included marches to **Kurapaty**, a site near Minsk where mass executions took place during the Stalinist era.

FEATURES

Nationalism and Reform

In Ukraine and Belarus political groups can be readily categorized into three groups — the extreme left (Sovietophiles, such as Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka; communists; and pan-Eastern Slavists), centrists, and center-right national democrats. The extreme right in both countries have miniscule support; racist and anti-Semitic remarks are more often heard from the extreme left. The policies of these three groups can be also easily divided according to their support for three parts of a single programmatic package — national revival (identity, language, culture); democratic and market reform; and cutting ties with the Soviet past and replacing Soviet and Eurasian values with European ones through "returning to Europe." As one moves from the extreme left to the center-right in Belarus and Ukraine, support for these three parts of a single programmatic package increases.

The strongest support for democratic reform and integrating into Europe is therefore to be found among center-right national democrats. It is no coincidence that support for these three aspects of a single program are also backed by political parties who draw upon those sections of the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations who have higher national consciousness and promote national revival and nation building. National identity, reform, and a pro-European orientation are intimately linked in Belarus and Ukraine.

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National democratic parties in Belarus and Ukraine are usually negatively depicted as extreme, anti-Russian "nationalists" by the Western media, scholars, and policy makers. One reason for this is the continued location of Western journalists in Moscow (as in the Soviet era), who write about the non-Russian former Soviet republics from this Russian vantage point or after occasional forays into Belarus or Ukraine. Moscow-based journalists and Western scholars with a Russophile Soviet-studies background have also tended to reinforce the stereotype that nationalism in Belarus and Ukraine is negative, especially when it attempts to provide affirmative action for Belarusian and Ukrainian language and culture subjected to centuries of Russification. In Belarus and Ukraine the center-right national democrats are akin to center-right parties in earlier periods of the West. (Scholars have still to provide any theoretical evidence to differentiate between civic nationalism and patriotism.)

In Belarus and Ukraine, nationalism is of a civic, patriotic variety that seeks to implement the necessary political, economic, and administrative reforms oriented toward radically breaking with the Soviet past and thereby integrating these countries into Europe. The tsarist and Soviet historical experience is understood as a negative aberration that placed Belarus and Ukraine outside European and Western developments.

Not surprisingly therefore, the extreme left are their arch opponents because they say the exact opposite. For Lukashenka, the Soviet experience was the most important historical event for Belarus in its entire history. As this was undertaken together with Russia as the "elder brother" of the USSR, then it is only natural for Belarus and Russia to be in union. Likewise, the Communist Party of Ukraine led by Petro Symonenko has been the only strong supporter of Lukashenka's regime in Ukraine.

Pan-Slavists agree with the communists and Sovietophiles that "White Russia" (Belarus) and "Little Russia" (Ukraine) should orientate themselves wholeheartedly to Russia. Where pan-Slavists and communists/Sovietophiles disagree is how their prescription for the present is based on their past understanding. Pan-Slavists look to the pre-Soviet era as their "golden age" and therefore see no problem in Belarusians and Ukrainians becoming part of Russia. Communists and Sovietophiles see the Soviet era as their "golden age" and therefore would not accept anything other than a union of sovereign republics. Pan-Slavists can be best depicted as Russian nationalists and communists/ Sovietophiles as Soviet nationalists.

In Belarus and Ukraine, centrists and national democrats are allied against the extreme left. In Belarus this was clearly seen in the September 2001 presidential elections when the majority of national democrats and centrists allied together into an election bloc led by Uladzimir Hancharyk, head of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation, to oppose Lukashenka's re-election. In Ukraine, the equivalent head of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, Oleksandr Stoyan, was a high-profile member of Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine bloc. In Ukraine, all centrist parties oppose Ukraine's membership in the Russian-Belarusian union

Centrist parties in Belarus and Ukraine are at once the easiest to define and the most difficult to categorize. Centrists tend to have their origins in the Soviet higher nomenklatura who abandoned the Communist Party in favor of "sovereign communism" in 1990-91 and then altogether when the party was banned after the August 1991 putsch. Centrists at first created no political parties but used their patronage networks to establish a nonconstituted "party of power." From the mid-1990s the "party of power" transformed itself into regional mini-"parties of power" in Ukraine as economic gains made in the reform process were transformed into political power. This happened to a greater extent in Ukraine than Belarus, because reforms were speeded up after 1994 whereas in Belarus Lukashenka's election in 1994 led to the gradual re-introduction of a neo-Soviet regime. Centrists were able to become oligarchs only in Ukraine. Because of their link to the Soviet past, centrists and oligarchs straddle the Soviet Eurasian past and the European future. Their past ways of operating in a nontransparent, corrupt fashion using patronage networks have been continued in Ukraine in the post-Soviet era. During the Brezhnev "era of stagnation" they learned to pay lip service to officially espoused rhetoric, then in the march from "developed socialism" to communism and now for "reform" toward "integrating into Europe." Centrists and

oligarchs prefer not to completely break with the Soviet past and hence prefer "third-way" populist alternatives. In the foreign policy arena they will espouse integration into the EU, and less so into NATO, but still prefer to remain active in the CIS. Hence, "multi-vector" foreign policies are preferable. Decisiveness in domestic or foreign policy is therefore not one of their strong points. As centrists originated in the largely Russified former Soviet nomenklatura, it is not surprising that their strongest support comes from the Russophone population. Hence, centrists are supporters of state building and independence but lukewarm on nation building, something that divides them from national democrats.

If Western policy towards Belarus and Ukraine aims to strengthen the reform movement, then it has little choice but to support the national democrats

In Belarus, most national democrats are willing to overlook the division with centrists on the national question because of their commonly perceived threat from Lukashenka. Russophones are the most passive and least active in civil society as well as being the most amorphous both ideologically and in national consciousness. Ideologically driven parties in Belarus and Ukraine only exist on the left and right.

In conclusion, if Western policy towards Belarus and Ukraine aims to strengthen the reform movement, then it has little choice but to support these very same national democrats whom it has often criticized in the past

(This report was written by Dr. Taras Kuzio who is a resident fellow at the Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.)

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U.S. Wants to See Change of Course in Belarus, State's Pifer Says

(Digital video conference with Dep. Asst. Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs)

Although the current state of relations between the United States and Belarus is "very poor," the relationship could be improved if the Lukashenko regime takes "some significant, real steps in the area of political liberalization," according to a State Department official who spoke August 12 in a digital video conference (DVC) with journalists in Minsk.

"Possibly this would be lifting the climate of repression, an end of the pressure on the independent media, an end of the pressure on non-governmental organizations," said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Steven Pifer.

"If the Lukashenko regime was prepared to take these steps, we would be prepared in parallel to take steps to improve the US-Belarusian relationship," he said. However, the United States sees "no willingness on the part of the Belarusian government to engage."

Pifer added that "the actions of the last five months have only increased our concerns about the state of play of democracy in Belarus. We see continuing pressure on non-governmental organizations and the independent media; we see the effort by the Lukashenko regime to close the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] mission that is operating in Minsk.... The perception here is that the Lukashenko regime is taking Belarus into greater isolation from the reform trends that are sweeping Europe."

He expressed concern that some Belarusian actions, particularly in the area of arms control, have raised "questions as to whether the Lukashenko regime has made the right decision in terms of which side it is going to be on in the struggle against terrorism."

The United States hopes that Russia will "use her influence with Belarus because we think that a reforming Russia would want to have a reforming Belarus as its neighbor," Pifer said.

"We believe that Russia, which is moving very strongly down the path of reform, ought to be concerned by the fact that Belarus is not only not moving down the reform path, but in some ways appears to be moving backwards," he added. As for the U.S.-Belarus economic relationship, Pifer pointed out some factors that make the business and investment climate in Belarus "so difficult," and also said that "as long as the democratic and human rights situation in Belarus is so difficult, that, too, is a very big disincentive that discourages American investors from looking at Belarus."

Placing the blame for the current state of affairs squarely on the Lukashenko regime, Pifer said the United States has seen "zero readiness" to pursue the path to improved relations proposed by the United States in February 2002.

"The U.S. Government is not pleased with this state of affairs. We would like to see this relationship changed; we would like to see a change of course by the Lukashenko regime. And we think that there is a path that the Lukashenko regime could move down if it wished to, in fact, change matters, but this is really a decision that rests in Minsk," he said.

Minsk, Belarus 12 August 2002

TRANSCRIPT OF DVC WITH AMBASSADOR STEVEN PIFER

Pifer: The current state of relations between our two countries is, unfortunately, very poor. The U.S. Government is not happy about this and one of the things that Ambassador Kozak and I did in February was to describe to senior Belarusian officials what we called a "step-by-step approach" to improve the relationship. The key to making this approach work would be the readiness on the part of the Lukashenko regime to take some significant, real steps in the area of political liberalization. Possibly this would be

lifting the climate of repression, an end of the pressure on the independent media, an end of the pressure on non-governmental organizations. There is a variety of steps that the Belarusian side could take. And what we said in February was if the Lukashenko regime was prepared to take these steps, we would be prepared in parallel to take steps to improve the US-Belarusian relationship.

Unfortunately, now, almost six months after my visit, we have not really received any kind of proposals on the part of the Belarusian Government to make use of putting into effect this step-by-step approach. And, in fact, the actions of the last five months have only increased our concerns about the state of play of democracy in Belarus. We see continuing pressure on non-governmental organizations and the independent media; we see the effort by the Lukashenko regime to close the OSCE mission that is operating in Minsk. And these all raise questions in our mind about Belarus and about where the Lukashenko regime is going. Unfortunately, the perception here is that the Lukashenko regime is taking Belarus into greater isolation from the reform trends that are sweeping Europe. I wish I could paint for you a brighter picture of US-Belarusian relations. We think the step-by-step approach offers a way forward, but unfortunately we see no willingness on the part of the Belarusian government to engage.

So, I think, at that point why don't I stop my opening comments, and I'll be happy to take your questions.

Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta: From what we know, in addition to your step-by-step proposal back in February, you had talked to the Belarusian government about arms control. Have there been any positive or negative changes? Have you managed to reach any agreement with the government in this regard?

Pifer: We raised in February some very serious concerns about transfers of arms by the Lukashenko regime to rogue regimes and other crisis areas. There's been nothing that we've seen in the last five months to alleviate or remove those concerns. In follow-up to my visit we did provide to the Ministry of Defense and others in the Belarusian government an outline that shows how the American Government controls the exports of arms. But that kind of system only works if there is a strong commitment at the top to make it work and prevent these arms from being transferred to rogue states and others where those weapons ought not to be going. And, unfortunately, we've seen no indications from the Lukashenko regime that it is prepared to move in a new direction and end the sorts of arms transfers that have been of great concern to us in the past.

Sovetskaya Belorussiya: The Belarusian government has more than once stated that in annual reports on human rights practices the United States have been incorrect and not objective. Is the United States going to change the informational policy towards Belarus and make sure the reports will be objective and precise, moreover that the United States policy towards Belarus has proved to be a circle of some kind?

Pifer: Let me first say that we make every effort to ensure that the human rights reports that we prepare on Belarus and on other countries present a full, accurate and objective picture of the situation for human rights and democracy in that country. The process of preparing this one is very detailed. The Embassy and the Department when they prepare these go to a broad range of sources for information. The fact that the human rights report for Belarus is such a critical report reflects the fact that the human rights and democracy situation in Belarus is so poor. And although the recent Belarusian government critique of the human rights report took issue with some of the small points, in our view it didn't really challenge the basic charges and concerns raised about the very deplorable situation of human rights in Belarus. For example, our human rights report makes reference to the fact that a certain group was arrested in March; the Belarusian Government came back and said that's incorrect, that really happened in April. The main point to us is not whether it happened in March or April, it is the fact that it happened. So, we very much stand by the conclusions of our human rights report; we think it is an accurate portrayal of the very difficult situation within Belarus.

Associated Press: As you said, the Belarusian government has done nothing to improve the situation with human rights or stop illegal arms transfers. Is the United States planning on imposing any sanctions in nearest future?

Pifer: The sanctions policy with regards to arms transfers is really keyed to case-by-case judgments. And this is a situation that is under constant review. On a broader question of human rights and our concerns there, it seems to me that the sanction that has been imposed on Belarus is really the fact that Belarus has isolated itself so much from Europe. And it is not just American criticism of the human rights situation within Belarus. It is criticism that takes place within the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] about the situation in Belarus. The fact that the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE recently overwhelmingly rejected the participation of the Belarusian Parliament is a reflection of their concern about the state of play of democracy and human rights in Belarus.

I think you have a situation where because of bad policy decisions and because of the fact that Belarus unfortunately is moving away from building democracy; that is leading Belarus into a situation of greater isolation because all of her neighbors are moving fairly strongly towards the path of reform. And that kind of isolation is unfortunate for the people of Belarus. I think more broadly it is unfortunate for Europe. But it is not going to change unless there is a change of policy by the Lukashenko regime.

RIA Novosti (Russia): Would you please clarify a step-by-step strategy and would you at least name several steps you would expect the Belarusian side to make and would you name several steps the US Government is prepared to make in return?

Pifer: What we tried when we put forward this step-by-step approach was to give the Lukashenko regime the flexibility to choose how it was going to move forward. So, we didn't say: we want Belarus to do actions a, b, and c. Instead we said: here are the areas in which we would look for movement by the Belarusian side. And we described areas that the OSCE Parliamentary Commission described

back in 1999 — areas like an end to the climate of fear and repression, an end to pressure of NGOs, an end to pressure on independent media. So, we described those broad areas.

And what we said to the Belarusian government was: You think of steps that you can take in the area of political liberalization in these broad categories and come to us with your ideas. And then we would look at what you propose to do and we would say if you are going to do this, then we will be prepared to upgrade U.S.-Belarusian relations in this way in terms of changing the level of contacts, perhaps, looking at some additional programs, perhaps, being more supportive of Belarusian participation in some of the European organizations.

The point was that we would be prepared to calibrate our steps. If the Belarusian government was prepared to take a big step, we would be prepared to take a big step. If the Belarusian government wanted to take a small step, then we would take a small step. But in either case the Belarusian government would know our response. We would say in advance: if you do this, we will respond in this way. So there would be total transparency on that. But we wanted to give the Belarusian side flexibility, so that it could choose the steps as a way to try to break out of this current low point in our relations.

When I was in Minsk in February, I thought I heard that the Belarusian government was interested in this approach. And Ambassador Kozak has been ready since February to have that kind of discussion. At the end of April I wrote Foreign Minister Khvostov and also the Head of the Presidential administration, Mr. Latypov, to basically say: "Can we move forward on this approach? What is your response?" But, unfortunately, here we are almost six months after we had that initial discussion in Minsk and we have seen zero readiness — absolutely no readiness on the part of the Belarusian side to pursue this approach. It will remain on the table, but unfortunately we have just seen no readiness to engage.

Radio Liberty: Are you consulting with your European allies in regard to unifying the policy towards Belarus? Do you believe that your policy differs very much from the European policy towards Belarus?

Pifer: We have regular discussions with a number of European countries and also with the European Union about the situation in Belarus. For example, in April I had consultations both with the Spanish, who at that time had the presidency of the EU and then also consultations in Brussels with EU officials about what was going on in Belarus, and about the American approach towards Belarus and the EU approach towards Belarus.

I would not say that US and EU policy towards Belarus is identical in every respect, but there is a huge amount of overlap. I think the Europeans share the sorts of concerns that we have about where the Lukashenko regime is going and the state of play with regards to democracy and human rights in Belarus. It is an issue that has a bit more urgency now for the European Union because they see in the not too distant future a situation where Belarus will border on member states of the EU. My sense is that the European Union has its own sort of step-by-step approach, looking for certain movement by the Belarusians. But, unfortunately, as in our case, there has not been the indication by the Belarusian side that it is ready to move in the right direction. Both the United States and the European Union would like to see a strengthening of the democratic situation in Belarus, would like to see Belarus join the mainstream of reform that is sweeping Central Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union. But I think we are both disappointed that this has not happened.

Den Newspaper: Given the sad forecast of the US-Iraq relations and given the close contacts between the Belarusian leadership and Iraq, could you comment on your opinion in regard to Belarusian contacts with those countries, which are under suspicion of involvement in terrorism?

Pifer: We are very concerned about contacts with countries like Iraq, particularly when it could get into contacts that would violate UN Security Council sanctions. And in the past we have seen specific contacts by the Belarusian government with Iraq that would be outright violations of UN Security Council sanctions. More broadly we are concerned about contacts with rogue states that have contacts with international terrorism. And we feel that since September 11 of last year there is a global campaign against international terrorism and it is important that all countries clearly choose which side they are going to be on in this conflict. When we look at some Belarusian actions, we have questions as to whether the Lukashenko regime has made the right decision in terms of which side it is going to be on in the struggle against terrorism.

BelaPAN: Recently we have heard that serious amounts of money may be allocated in order to support democratic development in Belarus, and people are talking about twenty, fifty, a hundred million dollars. Could you comment on this?

Pifer: The current US program allocates about ten million dollars a year, which is focused on the development of civil society and the strengthening of nongovernmental organizations within Belarus. I think we would like to be able to do more but, unfortunately, we have a limited amount of funds that we can apply to supporting reform efforts throughout the former Soviet Union under the Freedom Support Act. And it shouldn't be a surprise that those countries that are moving more actively in terms of internal reforms receive greater amounts of American assistance. The one point that I would add is that there has been a suggestion. Under consideration in Congress is a proposed piece of legislation known as Belarus Democracy Act, which would suggest that — as part of a number of things that that act lays out — that we might look at ways to increase funding for promotion of democracy within Belarus. That act reflects, I think, a great deal of frustration among the American Congress about the fact that Belarus is making no movement towards promotion of democracy and human rights. And it reflects, I think, a strong sentiment that we ought to look at what we can do to try to change that situation.

Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Do you agree that the policy of isolation of Belarus has brought no result in the last few years?

Pifer: I guess I would not describe it as a policy of isolation by the outside world towards Belarus. It is more a policy of self-isolation that the Lukashenko regime has imposed upon Belarus. But I think that in a situation where you have the flawed elections that we saw in September, where you have a continuing effort to stifle the development of a political opposition, where you have continued pressures on independent media, where you have the lack of real investigation into the fate of the disappeared — all of these questions create a situation where it is hard for Belarus to expect that it can interact on a normal basis with the democratic states of Europe. If Belarus wants to get out of this situation of self-imposed isolation, it is up to Belarus, I think, to make the changes that will begin to make the political situation in Belarus more compatible with those that are predominating in Europe. A Belarus that is moving down the reform path, that makes the decision to begin building democracy within the country, that begins to make decisions to build a market economy, that kind of Belarus is only going to be welcomed by Europe. But it is up to the Lukashenko regime to choose that course.

Thank you very much.

(Distributed by the Office of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State.
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"Shock"in Congress as Belarus Authorities Bulldoze New Church

Washington, August 5, 2002

United States Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ) is "shocked, but not surprised" that Alexander Lukashenka's government demolished a newly constructed church building on August 1st while parishioners were preparing for its solemn consecration.

Belarusian agents, camouflaged and armed with automatic weapons, reportedly surrounded the western village of Pahranichny. They cleared the way for a bus-load of demolition crews, cranes and bulldozers in an orchestrated effort to destroy the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church building, just hours before its parishioners planned to dedicate the new building.

"This outrageous crime further demonstrates how ruthless, corrupt and immoral Lukashenka's rule has become," Smith said. "Is nothing sacred in Belarus today, that the regime has to stoop so low as to level a parish church? Since Lukashenka has led Belarus to become a pariah state in the heart of Europe, nothing he does surprises me any more," Smith observed.

Government authorities have consistently refused state registration for the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, describing the church as a "non-existent religious group." The Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church is separate from the Belarusian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate. Lukashenka has pursued a policy of favoring the Russian Orthodox Church, while harassing other religious groups, including Catholics, Protestants and Hindus. "I condemn Mr. Lukashenka and the Belarusian Government for the wanton destruction of this house of worship. Regardless of ecclesiastical differences between the two village parishes, government intervention is uncalled for and demolishing a church building is unacceptable," Mr. Smith declared. "This further demonstrates the true nature of the Lukashenka regime and strengthens my resolve to pass the Belarus Democracy Act."

The Belarus Democracy Act of 2002, H.R. 5056, would promote democratic development, human rights, and rule of law in Belarus. The bipartisan measure authorizes an increase in assistance for democracy-building activities, encourages free and fair parliamentary elections, and would impose sanctions against the Lukashenka regime, including denying his high-ranking officials entry into the United States.

Authorities on Tuesday, July 23rd ordered the building destroyed, citing its "illegal"construction. According to news reports, plans filed by the church did not include designs for a basement. Demolition workers on July 26 tried to wreck the building with bulldozers. They encountered parishioners and other church supporters surrounding the building, some chained to its pillars, preventing authorities from destroying the church. No injuries were reported, but journalist and human rights activist Valery Shchukin was jailed for 15 days for attempting to write about the attack for the *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper. Six other individuals were fined.

The bulldozing is the most recent occurrence illustrating a deterioration of religious freedom and human rights in Belarus. Earlier this year, the Belarusian parliament considered a highly restrictive law on religion, deciding to postpone a vote until the autumn session. The government has furthermore escalated its harassment of non-Russian Orthodox religious communities.

The United States Helsinki Commission, an independent federal agency, monitors and encourages progress in implementing provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is composed of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce.

November 1830 through 1831

The national liberation uprising against the Russian empire and for the renewal of the *Recpaspalitaja (Republic) of Two Nations* (Poland and Litva)

November 1st through December 31, 1920
The Anti-Bolshevik Slucak Uprising

Anti-Bolshevik military action in the region of Slucak, organized by representatives of the Belarusan Democratic [National] Republic.

Thoughts and Observations

Politics Abhors a Vacuum

By Pawel Kazanecki

"Belarus is Bickering with Russia" - "Split in the Belarus-Russia Union". Under these banners Belarus returned to the pages of Polish newspapers for the first time since last yearís presidential elections. Even so, the writers are less than harsh on Belarus and Lukashenka. The reason for this attitude may be simply that nobody takes them seriously as international players and partners. Again and again Belarus has lost the chance to take its place in the world arena. Nobody is interested in Belarus anymore, and Lukashenka's angry outbursts are taken like the muffled domestic squabbles of one's neighbor as heard through the walls of an apartment.

The year 2001 concluded another phase in the evolution of international relations. The attack on the World Trade Center changed the political landscape of the world. Eastern European issues were moved to the back burner. The United States are primarily occupied with the preparations for war against Iraq. In the new-world view Belarus is once again a back-water.

One may state unequivocally that Russia was given *carte blanche* for the solution of the Belarusian question. Under the conditions in Belarus, she could have fallen through the front door at any time right into a place as mediator at the main table. But, she preferred to stay on the porch enjoying the view - and a smoke. Thus, the presidential elections of 2001 eliminated in Belarus all partners, capable of conducting political discussions. This only deepens this stagnation and listlessness in Belarus' international contacts. On one hand, the illegitimate parliament and president now continue to renounce all relations with Europe, and on the other, the helpless and even more disunited opposition are not at all serious partners. The viability of the political scene lies in a permanent dialogue. With no discussion partners there are no politics. During the era of its independence Belarus oscillated between three alternatives for its further existence on the international arena:

1) A neutral state, open to all neighbors (I would call it the Finnish alternative, promoted by Stanislau Shushkevich),

2) The potential candidate for entry into the European Union (the Baltic alternative, favored by most of the Belarusian opposition); and, finally,

3) Various forms of integration with Russia. Today Lukashenka revealed a new political alternative for Belarus: the isolationist alternative of the Cuban type.

What kind of future then awaits Belarus ? I see three possible paths of development.

The first is that the presidents of Belarus and Russia will finish playing political poker and Belarus becomes a part of Russia in some form or other. This would be seen by some as a remedy for the present diseased economy - the results of many years of Lukashenka's policies and indulgences, as well as the disappearance of many attributes of Belarus' independence. But then Lukashenka will be forced to come to terms with Putin and have to agree to playing a secondary role in this state. At the same time Russia would become the only guarantor of Lukashenka's power . This would mean the full restriction of his independence.

If the president wants to continue dealing the cards, then only two paths will remain to him: a full isolation of Belarus or a turn toward Europe. Both alternatives mean repudiation of the ideological course, promoted by the "President for Life" until now. This retreat will weaken his perceived strength, although it may actually help to preserve it for some time. However, choosing the isolationist course will lead to a full degradation of the economy and a further decline in living standards in Belarus. How low can it go and how much can the long-suffering Belarusians tolerate? This alternative is risky, especially under the conditions of decreased public support of the president and the continued weakening of the nomenclature, disgusted with the gradual degradation of the country and the absence of any prospects for improving its own living standards. The prospect of living on grass as people do in North Korea does not appeal to anyone — certainly not to the president himself, despite his tough image.

Thus the Cuban alternative brings no hope, and, principally does not guarantee a safe and predictable transfer of power in the future. Fidel Castro is old and wants to spend the rest of his life in his "preserved" state. President Lukashenka is relatively young and cannot be guided by this reasoning.

The isolationist alternative looks realistic only with a certain legitimization of Lukashenka's regime. Presidential elections of 2001 did not result in this legitimization. And its prospects are not helped either by the recently started guerilla war with Russia, for which the president is not likely to gain popular support.

Under these conditions only the reconciliation with the opposition may ensure this legitimization

Under these conditions only the reconciliation with the opposition may ensure this legitimization. Spouting independence cliches as well as stopping the oppression of the national culture may become the foundation for reaching this reconciliation. Allowing the opposition to enter the halls of local power and even the parliament does not seem to be a very high price for the possibility of retaining power, even limited, for one term.

The turn to face Europe may also become a way out of the present situation for the president himself. This alternative has several advantages. It opens the opportunity of new investments into the neglected economy of the country, allows the president to govern one more term with the full agreement of the international community and the local opposition, and, finally, it may give him a chance to exit the political pickle with a measure of dignity.

This alternative does not seem unacceptable to Europe either. After the presidential elections of 2001 and the complete blockade of the OSCE mission in Miensk, Europe stopped watching closely the development of events in Belarus. But, as we said before, politics does not tolerate a vacuum. The opportunity to settle relations with a country that in 2004 will become a neighbor of the European Union, may in the future become interesting and important for Europe. This of course assumes that the country still exists at that time!

What conditions must be realized for this ? The first one is the adoption of a serious attitude toward the opposition as partners by the presidentís side. Because nobody will play games anymore without a hope for victory. Lukashenka should become a predictable partner. He should realize that the improvement of relations with Europe requires a certain legitimization and stabilization of these relations on his side as well. A step in this direction may only need be the cessation of repressions against the independent media, creation of minimally favorable conditions for a dialogue with the opposition, and further allowing it to participate in governing the nation.

The dialogue with Europe should assume new forms that will be developed during the period of reanimated diplomatic contacts, not maintained by Belarus today. The renewal of these may be complicated without the support of the potentially interested European countries.

Poland and Lithuania remain probably the only countries concerned with the situation in Belarus. Germany preferred solving the Belarusian problem through a Russian proxy.

Potentially Poland may be interested in establishing closer contacts with todayís Belarusian regime. On one hand, as a candidate for entering the European Union, it has for some time supported Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in this process, and simultaneously has been active in establishing a special relationship with Ukraine. In this context Poland may become the country that would support Belarus in her aspiration to return to the family of democratic European nations. Such a mission may seem attractive to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, if only for the reason that its diplomatic team needs a win somewhere. However, such actions should be supported by unequivocal steps by Lukashenka in the direction of democracy.

Has Belarus already achieved the maturity to assume its place alongside European democracies ? Or will it lock itself in its own closet? The choice is with Lukashenka. The time has come to decide whether it is worthwhile to continue being only an instrument in Russiaís hands, or to really become a leader of a sovereign state and together with Belarusian elites develop a concept of national interests and begin its realization.

Pawel Kazanecki is a Polish expert on Belarusian affairs. He is the chairman of the Board of Directors for the Warsaw-based Institute for Support of Democracy in Eastern Europe (DC-IDEE)

Festival of Belarusian literature and printing

The IX Festival of Belarusian literature and printing took place in the town of Mir on Sept. 1, 2002.

The literary part of the festival agenda included recitals by Belarusian poets, exhibitions of medieval knights' dances and appearance by folklore and theatrical. According to the official sources the festival was attended by 20 - 25,000 persons.

The official government delegation was headed by the prime minister Hienadz Navicki, who addressed the public in Belarusian this time. So did the other ministers and representatives of local and regional authorities.

During the festival, militia detained two women- activists of the Belarusian Language Society for "illegal" distribution of independent newspapers *Naša Słova* and *Novy Čas*.

Source: *Naša Słova*, Sept. 4, 2002.

Will Lukashenka Survive as Putin Loses Interest in Union with Belarus?

By Taras Kuzio

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has become increasingly isolated and out of step with international developments since his re-election and the 11 September terrorist attacks against the United States — a trend best evidenced by the country's tepid relations with its closest ally, Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin has not shown the same level of interest in the much-touted Russia-Belarus Union, which is based on an interstate treaty that came into force in January 2000, as did his predecessor Boris Yeltsin.

As *Izvestiya* recently wrote, Lukashenka's problem is that he no longer has an ally in the Kremlin. "The chill in Russian-Belarusian relations appeared as soon as Putin replaced Yeltsin," *Izvestiya* added. Moreover, the presidential elections held in Belarus on 9 September, in which Lukashenka won in the first round with 75.62 percent of the vote, "marked a dramatic decline in relations between Moscow and Minsk" because it was reminiscent of a "farce," *Izvestiya* commented.

Four issues plague the union, which have caused Putin to lose interest in the union. First, Putin has openly poured cold water on the idea of equality between Russia and Belarus, upon which Lukashenka has always insisted. Pavel Borodin, the state secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union, told Russia's NTV television that Lukashenka's proposed model for the union, which he presented to Putin last month, is "nonsense" and "simply foolish."

Second, according to Putin, the Belarusian economy is only 3 percent as large as Russia's, but Belarus is demanding the right of veto while maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Lukashenka disagrees with the common perception in Russia that Belarus is using the union to obtain subsidies. Complaining about this view of Belarus as a freeloader, Lukashenka said, "Nobody has allowed himself to voice such an insult during the 10 years of Belarus' independence and sovereignty."

Third, a major stumbling block is how the union should be organized. On this question, Lukashenka increasingly sounds like his nationalist opponents when defending Belarusian sovereignty in the face of Russian efforts to define the union as the incorporation of Belarus. Lukashenka rules out Belarus becoming the 90th subject of the Russian Federation. This is totally out of the question for Lukashenka because, "No president of Belarus would take that step. In the Soviet Union, Belarus had more sovereignty." He went on to complain, "Even Stalin did not plan to deprive Belarus of its sovereignty." Syarhey Kastsyan, a deputy of the Belarusian Chamber of Representatives, rejected Putin's proposals for "a single state" with one government and parliament. The Belarusian understanding of "union" is akin to a new confederation of equal, sovereign states comparable to what the USSR was moving toward in late 1991.

Fourth, Lukashenka's hostility to economic reform includes opposition to the Russian takeover of the still small number of privatized companies. Lukashenka warned Russia that he would never "betray" Belarusian state interests and "give up Belarus to anybody," adding that he does not "need to sell enterprises to some Russian oligarchs."

Fundamentally, Putin's waning interest in the union amid these four disagreements is because the Russia-Belarus Union was always understood differently by Russia and Belarus. Both Yeltsin and Putin saw it in non-ideological terms, as a useful attribute to their foreign-policy arsenal and geopolitical designs. Putin prefers to view the union as building on the experience of the European Union.

But Lukashenka has always seen it very differently. As a Sovietophile pan-Slavist, he is ideologically committed to the union as a stepping-stone to a revived USSR, however unlikely that is a decade after it disintegrated. In the late 1990s, a union with Belarus was a means for Russia to assert itself as a "great power" vis-a-vis the West and NATO expansion.

Unfortunately for Lukashenka, Putin has tempered his opposition to NATO expansion, which has resulted in the development of a new "19+1" relationship between the alliance and Russia. Unlike Belarus, Russia is no longer engaging in the sort of anti-Western and anti-U.S. diatribes that it earlier unleashed during NATO's bombing campaign in Kosova and Serbia. Lukashenka's continued "anti-Westernism," as exemplified by his hostility to the OSCE presence in Minsk and to NATO expansion, seems increasingly anomalous in the aftermath of 11 September. After the creation of the NATO-Russia Council and Ukraine's announcement that it intends to seek NATO membership, Lukashenka is unsure where to turn.

Aware that he is being increasingly isolated, Lukashenka has now invited NATO to take part in annual military exercises. Lukashenka's calls for a "300,000-strong joint Belarusian-Russian military group" have also not been supported by Putin — presumably because it is not clear who such a force would be directed against. Although Belarus is a member of the CIS Collective Security Treaty (now Organization) its usefulness to that structure is not evident, as Lukashenka has always opposed the use of Belarusian troops outside Russia and Belarus. A new law adopted this month allowing Belarusian troops to undertake military missions abroad rules out sending them to "hot spots."

To Putin, the advancement of Russia's "strategic partnership" with Ukraine is now more important than a union with Belarus. The decision to create a Russian-Ukrainian gas consortium, which means an end to the idea of building a pipeline through Belarus, reflects Moscow's greater interest in Ukraine as a strategic asset. In addition, Ukraine under Kuchma, unlike Belarus under Lukashenka, is allowing Russian capital to take part in privatization. By 2005, 70 percent of commodities made in Ukraine will be produced with the participation of Russian capital.

As Russia increasingly cold-shoulders him and his regime, opportunities will arise for the Belarusian opposition and disgruntled elites to move against him. The Lukashenka regime no longer looks stable, and his popularity ratings are at an all time low of 25-30 percent. *The Washington Post* recently called upon Russia to prove its commitment to integration with the West by withdrawing its support for Lukashenka. If Moscow accepts this advice, Lukashenka is finished.

Dr. Taras Kuzio is a resident fellow at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.

Integration Story Proceeds, But Where To?

By Jan Maksymiuk

Media in Russia and Belarus reported last week that Russian President Vladimir Putin had addressed his Belarusian counterpart, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, with a letter concerning the further integration of both states. Putin reportedly assured Lukashenka that the development of integration with Belarus remains a priority task for the Kremlin.

Putin stressed that Moscow sees three possible integration scenarios: a full merger of Russia and Belarus into a single state, a suprastate formation like the European Union, or unification on the basis of the 1999 union treaty. The Russian president proposed to set up a joint team to analyze these three integration models.

Putin also said he is waiting for Lukashenka's answer to his offer on 14 August to introduce the Russian ruble as the single currency for Belarus and Russia as of 1 January 2004.

Lukashenka responded to Putin on 7 September at a news conference organized on the sidelines of the annual harvest festival (*Dazhynki*) in Polatsk. For starters, Lukashenka rebuked the Russian leader for allegedly making the content of the letter known to the media before it reached Minsk. "Apparently, there was the need for some public-relations action rather than a message," Belarusian television quoted Lukashenka as saying.

Lukashenka told journalists the same day that he sees no need to form a team of experts to study the three scenarios for Belarusian-Russian integration. "Those who prepared the letter — maybe it was Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] himself -- appear to have forgotten that we already have a Belarusian-Russian joint group, which, according to the [1999 union] treaty, is working on an act that would determine the way to build the union state," Lukashenka said. "There was nothing new in [the letter]," Lukashenka went on. "The same [old] story: dividing Belarus and incorporating it by pieces, or [pursuing integration] of an EU type. But they keep silent on the fact that they will offer EU-type integration only after we agree with Russia's proposal to abrogate the existing [union] treaty [of 1999]. If the Russian leadership wants to abrogate the treaty, let them do it, but without us. Belarus will not take part in this. This has been said publicly. Remember once and for all:

Lukashenka has never moved away from his path. I have always advocated a union. And what are they proposing? Incorporation.... Russia's leadership has made clear that it does not want an equal union with Belarus," Lukashenka said.

Lukashenka also said there are many reasons why Moscow does not want an equal union with Minsk. Among domestic reasons, Lukashenka named the reluctance of officials in the Russian government "to work on an equal basis [with Belarus]," as well as the wish of "rich people in Russia...to grab Belarus and criminalize the economy."

Lukashenka suggested that Russia is also under external pressure not to develop integration with Belarus. "This is like a litmus test — for the leadership of Russia, not for Lukashenka. Let's see whether the leadership of Russia will withstand this pressure on it in this situation, whether it will surrender Belarus or not," the Belarusian president said.

Meanwhile, the Moscow-based *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and the Minsk-based *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* published last week a transcript of a late-August telephone conversation between Russia's Union of Rightist Forces leader Boris Nemtsov and Belarus' United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka regarding possible models for uniting Russia and Belarus. Both Nemtsov and Lyabedzka have subsequently admitted that they did have such a conversation. (Nemtsov has asked the Prosecutor-General's Office to investigate how his telephone conversation could have been illegally recorded. Lyabedzka has suggested that his telephone might have been wiretapped by Belarusian special services.) According to the transcript, Nemtsov told Lyabedzka that the Kremlin may be willing to cooperate with the Belarusian opposition in order to overthrow Lukashenka. Nemtsov asserted that Putin is totally aware that the incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Federation is not a feasible integration model. Nemtsov colorfully explained to Lyabedzka why Putin publicized his incorporation proposal on 14 August: "[Putin] decided to pin [Lukashenka] into a corner. [Lukashenka], pardon my saying, had f****d him up to such an extent that he simply decided to take a swing at him publicly, in front of television cameras and radio microphones. [Lukashenka] had speculated all the time on this union but did not want to do anything in earnest and endlessly jeered at Belarusian and Russian businesses. So [Putin] hit him where it hurts, that's all. Of course, [Putin] realizes perfectly well that the first variant [incorporation] is impossible; he is an absolutely sane man. The second variant [EU-type integration], he said, is for the West and the Russian and Belarusian democrats."

Nemtsov also explained to Lyabedzka how the Kremlin sees an EU-type integration with Belarus: "On the one hand, this variant preserves the [Belarusian] statehood and so on. On the other hand, it gives the possibility — through a standard European procedure — to ratify union accords connected with taxes, tariffs, customs services, and so on. I think that this variant is very advantageous to you [the Belarusian opposition], and it will allow you to put pressure on Luka[shenka] in order to oust him."

Nemtsov said he arranged a meeting for Lyabedzka in the Kremlin with Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, to discuss ways to promote the EU-type integration and to undermine Lukashenka's position in Belarus.

The fact that the transcript was published by Lukashenka's main press mouthpiece, "Sovetskaya Belorussiya," indicates that he was personally interested in making the content of the Nemtsov-Lyabedzka conversation public. Indeed, the conversation gives Lukashenka a strong argument in support of his well-publicized thesis that Belarusian-Russian integration -- the "people's will" -- is being hindered by backstage influences and political operators conspiring to put the Belarusian economy into the hands of Russian oligarchs.

On the other hand, however, the publication unambiguously suggests that Lukashenka is now in disfavor with the Kremlin, and that the latter would not object to replacing the edgy Belarusian leader with someone more compliant.

According to the Minsk-based Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies (NISEPI), the number of supporters in Belarus of the unification of Belarus and Russia into a single state increased from 24 percent of the population in 1999 to 32 percent in 2002. At the same time, the number of staunch advocates of Belarus's sovereignty decreased from 28 percent to 16 percent. According to NISEPI head Aleh Manayeu, these shifts in public moods in Belarus could be explained by the increasing popularity of Putin in Russia and the pro-Western policy he has launched following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Manayeu asserts that many Belarusians now hope for the export of democratic and economic reforms from Russia, while the bulk of supporters of Belarusian-Russian integration previously consisted of those wanting a return of the Soviet Union.

Irrespective of the real reasons behind this increase in the number of Belarusian backers of unification with Russia, it appears that a change of leadership in Belarus is now more likely than it has ever been during Lukashenka's rule. The social base of support for Lukashenka has noticeably shrunk.

It is hardly imaginable that Lukashenka may strengthen his position by taking a tough pro-independence position and winning the Belarusian democratic opposition to his side. According to NISEPI, more than 73 percent of supporters of Belarusian sovereignty are at the same time firm opponents of Lukashenka and his regime.

And this means that if the democratic opposition fails to produce in the near future an alternative leader who is acceptable for both Moscow and the domestic electorate, then Lukashenka, in order to remain in power, may soon begin to yield to the Kremlin's pressure and integrate with Russia according to Putin's "first variant.")

Source: *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, Sept. 10, 2002. Copyright © 2002, RFE/RL., Inc. Reprinted with permission*

Learn To Fight For Independence

The lingering period of weird integration between Russia and Belarus ended up in Putin's scandalous annexation proposal. Alexander Lukashenko recovered from shock only a few hours later, when he returned from Moscow and felt solid ground under his feet. In no time the man proclaimed himself a true Belarusian patriot, who stands for the independence of his country. Some analysts claim that the years of his presidency, sacrificed at the altar to the union state, were wasted. Beloruskaya Delovaya Gazeta correspondent turned for commentary on the present situation to the leader of the Russian "Democratic Union," ***Valeriya NOVODVORSKAYA.***

Valeriya Ilyinichna, do you think that after another union row the Belarusian-Russian amalgamation still has a future?

Neither Russia of Putin nor Belarus of Lukashenko have any future. Belarusian future is "Young Front", BPF and the "ZUBR" movement. I was so pleased to see them tear Putin's portraits the other day. If they have any left untouched, let them send them to the "Democratic Union" – we will tear them too. It goes without saying that Putin wants to engulf Belarus, so that it could no longer stir under his feet. He makes it clear as day. Yeltsin used to play equality for some time, but Putin is unwilling to play anymore. He simply proposed to Belarus to turn into a Russian province. That's exactly what the imperial Russia did before the October coup – colonization, russification, prohibition of national languages. Take Ekaterina-II, for instance. The lady was considered a liberal monarch, but she banned the Ukrainian language. Same would happen to Belarus: assimilation, loss of the national independence and identity. I can tell you only one thing: keep as far from Russia as possible. The only thing Belarus gain is the opportunity to send its troops to fight in Chechnya, for we have nobody to send there anymore.

Don't forget that most Russians have imperial mentality

Who is responsible for driving Belarusian-Russian relations to such a dangerous condition?

On one hand, of, course, Lukashenko, who flirted with Russia and even annihilated the national flag and coat of arms. You don't find a president like that easily. And here's the result of all his voyages to Moscow. On the other hand, Belarusians are to blame for their misfortunes too. The society remains too indifferent to its own national history and dignity. Otherwise, Lukashenko would never become president even through a rigged vote. And also bear in mind the desire of the majority of Russians, elite included, to swallow Belarus. Don't forget that most Russians have imperial mentality. They are quite frankly unable to realize that some people want freedom. Take Chechnya as the most vivid example. "Why do they fight? Don't they like staying with us? What liberty do they want in a commonwealth of brotherly nations?" These are three main factors, which drove you where you are now.

After Putin suggested that Belarus join Russian Federation, the majority of Russian politicians started almost in unison commending him for that. Didn't they realize that the proposal was derogatory for Belarusians?

All, except the "Democratic Union". If you are able to watch the "Facts" program, televised on 6th channel, then you could see me say openly what both incumbents personally want and what consequences that will bring about for Belarus in the end. This amalgamation variant had been first coined by Gaidar and Chubais even before they founded the Union of Right Wing Forces within the "Democratic choice" bloc. Back then these two realized that this is the only realistic unification model. For them the main concern was the stability of the Russian ruble. And the loss of national identity of a whole country meant little if anything to them. Russian political elite, to the exclusion of the "Liberal Russia", chaired by Yushenkov, is imperial in itself. Perhaps Yavlinsky could understand you better, but he keeps silent on the issue. But apart from them, you will find no supporters. The only thing left for you is to count on yourselves. And never again elect such presidents as Lukashenko, who easily surrender their countries to foreign invaders.



Valeriya Novodvorskaya

Could this be explained by the fact that Russia is falling apart herself?

Russia has been always falling apart. That's her normal state. In order to have such will for freedom as the Chechens do, you need to be different from an empire. Our governors, such as Shaimiev from Tatarstan, prefer to live on the budget donations, and don't really plan to get out of Russia's composition. Apart from the Chechens, who want to form their national state, the rest aren't at all devoted to the freedom idea. Russia doesn't notice that she is in a miserable condition herself. Expansion is the key law of the Moscow hordes, inherited from the Gingis Khan's Golden Horde. The latter also cared not for what's going on in the rear: he only moved forward. Inability to make use of their gains is typical for such countries, which destroy what belongs to others but always fail to build their own.

Upon his arrival to Minsk this spring, the SPS (Union of right wing forces) leader Boris Nemtsov told the journalists literally the following: don't fear Russia and her capital, which will make you as affluent as the Japanese.

That's hypocrisy. Nemtsov is naive and short-sighted, but not to such an extent. He genuinely doesn't understand

why somebody would need freedom. Apart from the Russian capital, you will get something else. In fact, I figure, Belarus doesn't need Russian FSB for you have special services of your own, which kill opposition members. That means you are "fine" in this sphere. Instead of the Russian capital you will get Siberia for your dissidents and Chechnya for your young men. Once the majority of the Russian political elite won their elections only through the approval of combat actions in Chechnya and now that this elite is all under Putin's feet, they will not protect you at the expense of their place in the sun.

It is not for nothing that both Yeltsin and Putin embraced Lukashenko so tightly – they won't let him go so easily now.

Right you are. Lukashenko is a typical satellite, collaborationist and Moscow's lackey. He is becoming stubborn now, for he fears that he won't have enough authority and money. But if they officially appoint him a governor-general of the province, called "Belarus", I think he will yield to the proposal. He's simply afraid that they won't share with him.

On his return from Moscow Lukashenko became the most zealous defender of the Belarusian independence. Some even expressed fears that if the national Belarusian elite swallows that bait, Lukashenko will manage to retain grip on power for many more years.

You must know with whom to have business. Once you made a blunder by nominating as presidential candidate a trade unionist Goncharik, who called Moscow twice a day and reassured everyone that he would integrate better than Lukashenko. You cannot unite with your foes, even if they share your ideas for a while. Conscious citizens must keep away from Russia, struggle with Lukashenko, restore their flag and coat of arms and draw closer to Europe. Your orientation should be to Poland and Lithuania, but never to Russia.

A few years ago you said that if Russia engulfs Belarus, you would take the side of the Belarusian Popular Front in the armed revolt against the oppressors. That statement of yours won you great popularity in Belarus. Are you indeed ready for that?

That was Konstantin Borovoi's joke. We released such a statement: if they form some union state, we will refuse to accept its citizenship and retain only Russian passports. We forwarded our notification to Pavel Borodin and that's where it is now. Needless to say, that we have always been on the side of Belarus, Chechnya, Ukraine and all other colonies. Our program back in 1989 included the disintegration of the USSR. So imagine how we abhor the idea of drawing Belarus back into Russia. But first learn how to fight for your independence at the ballot box, so that such individuals as Lukashenko don't get elected. For if the nation elects Lukashenko, it will never join partisan groups in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha or Polesie.

Belarusian politicians assume that Russia will manage to get the best of Lukashenko and will still incorporate Belarus. What is your prognosis?

I've got no forecasts on this point. Everything is quite predictable. Now everything depends solely on the behavior of the Belarusian nation. If Lukashenko realizes that he will be no longer able to stay in his homeland once he loses the country to Russia. Russians won't make him Vice-President, for they don't need someone like him. Nor will he flee to the West, of course, while going to Saddam Hussein or Kim Ir Chen may be fraught with starvation.

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, 29 August 2002.

Belarus: International Concern Mounts Over Disappearances

By Valentinas Mite

The international community is becoming more vocal in expressing concern over the disappearances of well-known opposition figures in Belarus. Recently, the OSCE called Belarusian authorities to permit an independent inquiry into the case of Belarusian journalist Dzmitry Zavadski, who went missing two years ago. Last week, several factions of the Russian State Duma urged President Vladimir Putin to press Belarus to investigate all its disappearance cases.

Prague, 9 July 2002 (RFE/RL) — A number of Belarusian opposition figures have mysteriously disappeared in recent years. They include former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka, opposition leader Viktar Hanchar, businessman Anatol Krasouski, and Dzmitry Zavadski, a cameraman with Russia's ORT television station, who was last seen alive in July 2000.

Members of the Belarusian opposition say all those to have gone missing were critics of the country's president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka. They hold the government responsible for the disappearances, a claim Lukashenka denies. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in recent days has called on Belarus to address the mounting concern over the country's missing persons. Freimut Duve, the OSCE representative on media freedom asked Belarusian authorities on 7 July to permit an independent inquiry into the case of Zavadski. Duve said he sympathizes with the cameraman's friends and family, who have gone two years with no explanation of his disappearance.

Jean Eschenbachar is the spokesman for the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). He said the OSCE has expressed repeated concern about the fate of the missing people, but that the Belarusian government has been unresponsive. "Basically, what we [have] stated repeatedly is that we are very concerned about the disappearances in Belarus. We have repeatedly asked the Belarus authorities to provide us with information about the circumstances of the disappearances, but [have gotten] no reaction. And we have also called for an independent investigation of all unsolved cases," Eschenbachar said. Political forces in Russia have also become more vocal in calling for a thorough investigation into missing people in Belarus.

Last week, a group of factions in the Russian State Duma (lower house), including Yabloko, the Union of Rightist Forces, Unity, Regions of Russia, and Fatherland-All Russia, urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to press Belarus to investigate the disappearances and to order Russian secret services to aid in the probe. Union of Rightist Forces leader Boris

Nemtsov said Putin is concerned about the number of people who have gone missing in Belarus. "Putin said that it is a very serious problem and that he is sure to speak about it with Lukashenka," Nemtsov said. Nemtsov said Putin has a very clear stance toward Belarus and that Lukashenka will face serious problems if he continues to refuse to cooperate on the issue of the disappearances. "I think he will have problems if he continues to be silent about the disappearances of politicians, journalists, and businessmen. [Russia] will put pressure on Lukashenka. Russia wants democracy in Belarus more than any other country. We want a united state with them, other countries do not," Nemtsov said. Nemtsov said if plans do progress on a stalled Russia-Belarus union, there will be no place for Lukashenka.

Pavel Sheremet is a director of special projects with Russian ORT television. In 1997, he and Zavadski were both arrested by Belarusian authorities while working on a documentary about Belarusian border issues. The incident put a strain on Russian-Belarusian relations, and after several months, both journalists were released from jail. Sheremet said Lukashenka should look at the appeal by the Russian Duma factions, including the powerful pro-Kremlin Unity faction, as a serious wake-up call. "The fact that this appeal to Putin was signed by the leaders of the biggest factions, and that Putin openly met with them and openly discussed the problem, means that it is a menacing reminder for Lukashenka," Sheremet said. Kirill Koktysh of the Moscow Institute of International Relations is less optimistic than Sheremet. He said that Belarus is a closed society with a single center of power, the president. He said the OSCE and international community have little practical influence over Belarusian affairs, and that Russia, while better-positioned to persuade, has done little to effect change in Belarus. "Theoretically, Russia can do a lot. But when we look at the Belarusian-Russian union state, it is clear that Russia has never truly realized its position as a big brother. At least, until now, [Russia] has had no real influence on the [Belarusian] president and on events taking place there. Maybe Russia wants to have some influence, but until now it hasn't managed to," Koktysh said.

Sheremet said Putin, should he decide to, could up the pressure even further. He said Russian intelligence services have collected substantial information about the role of top Belarusian officials in disappearances of people like Zavadski. "Moscow can do a lot in disclosing the truth about those crimes. But the problem is whether it will decide to act. I am afraid the Kremlin still finds no alternative to Lukashenka. They hope to bring him to order and to keep him as the head of the Belarusian state and they want this man to be under [their] control," Sheremet said.

But Sheremet said that ultimately, Russian politicians are not interested in Belarusian issues. He said the Duma factions issued their appeal to Putin only at the urging of the Belarusian opposition.

(Yury Drakahrust from RFE/RL's Belarusian Service contributed to this report.)

Source: *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine - Belarus*, July 9, 2002

Growing Repression in Belarus

Wolfgang Behrendt (SPD), the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's Rapporteur on Belarus, is fiercely critical of the way in which President Alexander Lukashenko and his regime are stamping on freedom of the press. The leader of the German delegation to the Strasbourg Assembly is indignant at the prison sentences passed on journalists and the banning of independent papers. He wants Assembly to send a special committee to Minsk, to investigate the fate of several missing politicians - something the Council of Europe has never done before. He complains that, recently, political repression in Belarus has actually worsened.

Question: Your report comes out against Council membership for Belarus. What are the main problems?

Wolfgang Behrendt: The situation in Belarus has not simply failed to improve - it has actually become worse. Things are particularly bad with regard to press freedom. A number of journalists are in prison, various papers are being hounded by the authorities, and some have even been banned. The influence of the independent media is visibly declining. Now, Lukashenko even wants to stop people watching Russian television. And the regime is still going after its opponents. Mikhail Chigir, the ex-Premier, has been given a three-year prison sentence and banned from politics - which puts him well out of the running as a rival to Lukashenko. And there's no mistaking the way that the trade unions, which used to be part of the opposition, are being made to toe the line.



Wolfgang Behrendt

Question: In spite of countless appeals by the Council of Europe and your own repeated criticisms, political progress in Belarus is minimal. Now, with the Assembly's autumn session coming up, Viktor Ivashkyevich, another journalist, has been sent to prison for two years for allegedly insulting President Lukashenko. Does Minsk take the Council seriously?

Wolfgang Behrendt: I think Lukashenko takes it seriously enough. After all, he hopes to get some kudos from joining it. But he's trying to force his way in by confrontation - he probably thinks we can't say no forever. He's obviously betting on the Council's giving way. But he's wrong there - he'll have to come some way to meet us.

Question: You want the Assembly to send a special committee to Belarus, to find out what has happened to the people who have gone missing. The Council has never sent a committee like this to any other country. Why Belarus?

Wolfgang Behrendt: The authorities in Belarus claim they have no way of finding out what has become of the half-dozen missing politicians - all of them former leading figures in the country. The supposed murderers of one of them were put on trial - but behind closed doors, which suggests a cover-up. Our feeling is that Lukashenko knows something about the disappearances. We have indications, some of them from police and secret service sources, that these people have been murdered, with connivance in some very high places. There's no comparison with the numbers, of course, but this kind of thing in Belarus makes one think of the people who disappeared in Chile and Argentina under the dictators. Throwing light on all of this would be our committee's job.

Question: In spite of all the critical things you say about the situation in Belarus, you want to keep the contacts open, and you even suggest that the Assembly might consider restoring the Minsk Parliament's special guest status. Why?

Wolfgang Behrendt: You have to make a distinction between Lukashenko's repressive regime and the Belarus Parliament. The Parliament is still trying to pursue an independent policy (sic !), even though its powers have been curtailed. The Council of Europe can support its efforts morally and politically by staying in touch, and it can use special guest status to encourage them. But we want to see a whole series of improvements first. For example, we'd expect the Parliament to liberalize the media laws, appoint a human rights commissioner, make the electoral laws democratic, and push for a moratorium on the death penalty.

Source: *Charter`97 Press Center, 1 October 2002* .

www.coe.int

Festival of Belarusian medieval culture

The Festival of medieval culture **"Alarm in Zaslauje"** was staged in the ancient town of Zaslauje on September 7-8, 2002.

The staging of this festival was initiated two years ago by the Ehnographic Museum of Zaslauje and the knights' club "Kniažy Huf". The medieval atmosphere of ancient Zaslauje was created by exhibiting medieval craftsmen at work: potters, woodcarvers etc., as well as knights' jousting tournaments. Town's central square hosted a concert of the medieval and folklore music. At the climax of the event was the reconstruction of a battle and siege of the Zaslauje castle by the troops of duke Svidryhajla in 1434.

Source:
Information Center of the World Alliance BACKAUSCYNA

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But Some Are More Equal Than Others

By Vera Rich

A new, discriminatory bill ironically titled "On the Freedom of Denominations and Religious Organizations" was passed on 2 October by the Council of the Republic (upper house of the Belarusian National Assembly -- a "parliament" that consists exclusively of supporters of the authoritarian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka).

The bill had previously been passed by the Chamber of Representatives (lower house) on 27 June. Opponents of the bill had tried to make use of the respite provided by the summer recess to campaign against it, but they did so in vain. For the bill had the backing of President Lukashenka, who sees the Orthodox Church (subject to the Moscow Patriarchate) as an important ally in his political aim of union with Russia. The bill stresses "the decisive role of the Orthodox Church in the historical progress and development of the spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people." It lists the other "traditional" faiths of Belarus as Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam, but in effect discriminates against them, and even more so against nontraditional faiths.

New restrictions include a ban on organized prayer except by registered religious communities. To register, 20 Belarusian citizens must sign an application, which in the political climate of today's Belarus requires a considerable level of commitment and courage. (Under the previous legislation, only 10 citizens' signatures were needed.) All religious publications will require government approval before they are distributed or placed in libraries. Faiths that have had a presence in the country of less than 20 years will now be prevented from publishing literature or carrying out missionary work. (Ironically, this category will include the "Greek Catholic" or "Uniate" Church, which from 1596 to 1839 was the mainstream faith of Belarus but was subsequently suppressed by the tsarist regime. The Soviets followed suit, and this church emerged from the catacombs only in 1990.)

The head of the Belarusian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, not surprisingly hailed the new law, which gives his church such a privileged status. Spokesmen for the civil authorities likewise praised it. Interestingly, they all concurred in maintaining that the law in no way infringed international human rights covenants or European democratic practice. Thus, Filaret asserted that, "There is nothing undemocratic about the preamble of the law that is causing the fight." The bill, he said, recognizes the "determinative role" of the Orthodox Church in the historical development of the spiritual, cultural, and governmental traditions of Belarus and also acknowledges the historical role of the Roman Catholic Church and the "inseparability of Evangelical Lutheranism, Judaism, and Islam from Belarusian history." The opposition to the bill expressed recently by Protestant churches is, Filaret said, a "fuss caused by fears that Belarus

will unite with Russia and thus establish a pattern for other former Soviet republics to follow."

Likewise, Mikalay Charhinets, the chairman of the legislative Committee on International Affairs and National Security, claimed that many European countries limit the number of recognized religions and said that while religions should be equal before the law, they cannot play an equal role in society. The mayor of Minsk stated that local officials consider Orthodoxy to be the dominant religion in Belarus and that the Russian Orthodox Church, "unlike the Roman Catholic Church, has never attempted to replace the secular authorities." These avowals, however, can be justified neither by the restrictive nature of the new law nor by the manner of its drafting.

In a presentation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 27 September, Vintsuk Vyachorka, the head of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front, stressed that, in spite of the constraints it would impose on faiths other than official Orthodoxy, "no consultations with the overwhelming majority of religious denominations took place while the bill was being drafted." Vyachorka further noted that "many in Belarus and abroad regard it as discriminatory against religious minorities" and that "the leaders of such faiths as the Evangelical, Baptist, Pentecostal, the Church of the Full Gospel, the Adventist, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, and Krishna Consciousnesss faiths, as well as Progressive Judaism and others, expressed their concern that the passing of such a law would lead to growing intolerance." Already, Vyachorka said, there has been a perceptible growth in "religious tensions incited by the authorities." As examples, he cited the recent demolition of a newly built parish church of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (a body independent from Moscow, which, during the Soviet period, could exist only in exile) and the jailing of members of the Hari Krishna movement for staging a peaceful protest against the "religious-freedom" bill.

Vyachorka's presentation (made on behalf of the entire pro-democracy Belarusian opposition, and which covered the whole gamut of human rights abuses in Belarus) met a firm response from PACE: The latter passed a resolution condemning the "stagnation" of democratic reform in Belarus and a refusal to renew its "special-guest status" at PACE until there was considerable progress. Lukashenka and his team tried to dismiss the condemnation, with suggestions that PACE is simply a lackey carrying out the orders of the United States, but the attempts of the president's supporters, including Filaret, to present the bill as "democratic" suggests that the PACE criticism did, in fact, strike home. Nor was PACE alone: The international human rights community has been vocal in its condemnations.

To quote but two responses, Article 19, the global campaign for freedom of expression, called the new bill "highly restrictive and totally unjustified" and "bound to exert a chilling effect on the right to freedom of expression." Congressman Christopher H. Smith, co-chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, expressed his "immense concern for the future of religious freedom in Belarus" in the light of the bill. *(RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, 8 October 2002)*

BELARUS' FORUM

Belarus has to be an Independent Democratic European State

A joint resolution from the BPF Party and the BPF movement "Adradzennie." by their congress that took place on September 7, 2002.

Recent events confirm the correctness of the strategic decision made by BPF's Party organization to build an independent Belarusian state incorporating the goal of good neighborly relations with Russia without any entry into any state unions, union states or other forms of political unification between the two nations. This is the only way to protect Belarus' statehood from a replay of destruction or subjugation at the hands of the rulers of Moscow as occurred in 1772 and 1920. The BPF Party unequivocally rejects the ultimatums from Russia's government and officials concerning the fate of Belarus' independence. These statements offend the Belarusian people, threaten their inalienable rights and entitlement to have an independent state, and the existence of Belarusians as a people. Also, they disrupt and put in dispute the stability of European state boundaries, guaranteed in the Helsinki (1975), and Budapest (1992) agreements.

The Russian government doesn't present Lukashenka with demands for reforms leading to the democratization of Belarus' political system. Rather, Mr. Putin is interested only in the selection and elaboration of a mechanism of incorporating our country in order to satisfy the Kremlin's imperial ambitions and the interests of Russian oligarchs. All the while, Mr. Putin and his ruling clique exploit the bad reputation of the Minsk regime in order to justify on the international scene its alleged right to export democracy to Belarus by means of a full or partial, fast or gradual incorporation. They offer us a false choice between Belarus with Lukashenka or, democracy without Belarus. But gaining an independent, sovereign, and democratic Belarus cannot be a subject of barter. Putin's ultimatum to Lukashenka could not be possible without Lukashenka's groundwork, which made our country an impoverished hostage of his own ambitions. Lukashenka fell into a trap built by his own hands. Now an attempt is underway to turn the state's propaganda machinery in the direction of national independence. In reality, however, it is not for the defense of independence, but the self-serving defense of an autocratic regime. It does not rest on the traditions and national values of an independent Belarusian people and state. For too long the official propaganda has been misleading people by promising them all kinds of goodies in return for joining-up in some configuration with Russia. This propaganda campaign will soon end after Lukashenka bargains for conditions personally acceptable only to him and his ilk in exchange for surrendering the nation's independence.

The surrender of independence continues. This is manifested by the preparation of a scenario and a schedule of replacing of Belarusian currency with the Russian rouble. The BPF Party considers such a step, along with the signing any agreements leading to the destruction of our independence and statehood, as a crime and warns everyone who prepares these crimes about their inevitable accountability in the future. Any decisions connected with the abolishment of Belarus' sovereignty will be invalidated.

The international public opinion regarding Belarus' independence is formed by using the results of sociological polls. However, under the conditions of an information blockade and after many years of the biased anti-Belarusian propaganda, the people are cautious about candidly expressing their opinions and are incapable of making a substantial decision. It is time to stop speculations based on data obtained from public opinion polls. The future of Belarus cannot depend on imperfect sociological technologies or, so much the worse, on the political commitment of sociologists.

It is impossible neither to build democracy in Belarus by destroying its independence, nor to retain an independent state while Lukashenka's regime continues to prevail. The solution lies in building a wide coalition in defense of independence and against dictatorship that will consolidate various forces around a single strategy and coordinated action. The first step of such a coalition has to be the development of a joint position regarding Belarus' independence and a strategy for informing the world community about this position. This autumn it is necessary to implement a large-scale national action in defense of state independence, which will testify to Russia and the world the commitment to independence of Belarus. Such actions have to become regular and grow in scale. The local elections campaign should be used as an opportunity for the consolidation of the independence-minded democratic forces and for delivering objective information to millions of people. As a result, the conditions for political changes towards democracy will mature in Belarus, making it possible to preserve real independence as well.

Most Belarusians see the future of their independent country as a part of European society. The European idea fills the struggle for independent democratic Belarus with a concrete sense: our country should join the European Union. The BPF party should demand guarantees from the European Union, that immediately after downfall of the dictatorial regime, our country will be considered a high-priority candidate for membership in the Union. Such guarantees will refute the harmful belief, that the European Union is reconciled to the loss of Belarus' independence and will help any Belarusians to assume an active democratic position.

The Belarusian nation must have enough strength to solve the shameful problem of Lukashenka's dictatorship. Otherwise, others will solve it for us; but the price may be the loss of our Fatherland.

Paval Mazejka's Last Trial Statement

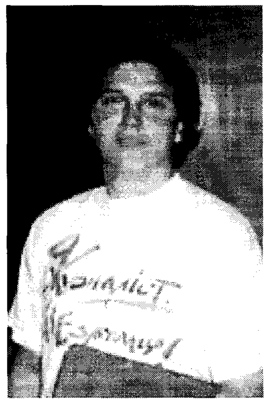
On June 24, 2002 the district court in Horadnia found the editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper Pahonia ***Mikola Markievic*** *(40) and the journalist* ***Paval Mazejka*** *(23) guilty of slandering the president of Belarus. They were sentenced to 2.5, respectively 2 years of "restricted freedom."*
Below is the text of Mazejka's last statement at his trial:

Your Honor , Honorable State Prosecutor, my Friends:

This is the first time and hopefully the last time I appear in public to present my final word under these kinds of circumstances. I shall not try to dwell on the legal aspects of my case; my defense counsel has already described it in a brilliant fashion.

I shall speak about the feelings of an innocent man kept for 10 months at foot of his gallows while a group of people fashions a rope for his neck.

I don't know whether the State prosecutor is aware of the fact that every day of this disgusting trial, every day of this brutal assault on the Word, every paragraph of his speech and all of it published from this case in the Belarusian and foreign press are mortal blows to Belarus' reputation, and indeed Belarus.



Paval Mazejka

Today I may congratulate the State prosecutor on the fact that his words are killing the hope that others will regard Belarus as a normal democratic country and treat us as a viable society, one that can clearly differentiate between the prosecution of crime and the pursuit of an agenda.

Could it thus be that this trial, conducted in the beginning of the third millenium, bespeaks only one thing: that it is impossible to deal with Belarusians? May it never be so!!! My colleagues from Poland, Germany, Russia and other countries are calling me and asking: "Have all of you in Belarus gone mad ? The prosecutor is asking for a term of imprisonment, while his entire accusation is based on phrases like 'I think..', 'It seems that ..'. This is the ultimate lawlessness !", say my outraged colleagues.

I cannot tell them that it isn't so; and that we are sitting here and discussing the problems of the Belarusian press over a cup of coffee. I can tell them only this: this is a political trial. There is an intention to seduce the judiciary and to make it deviate from the standards of professional duty, dignity and decency.

Ales Adamovič was right when he said: "... Your greatest wealth is your Fatherland. That's why you should devote your life to it, be with it with your every thought, and

do everything for its good ..." The State prosecutor cannot comprehend how you can love your homeland without reciting praises. Rather, this is a love different from the one that was shown once during party meetings, compulsory communist demonstrations, or as now done: during a five-minute diatribe at the prosecutor's office.

I did not learn to love my Fatherland with my eyes closed and head humbly bowed, assuming a pose all of us have been dilligently forced into in the last eight years. A man, a journalist, is useful to his Fatherland only when he takes off rose-colored glasses to see clearly the country where he lives, understands its problems, and openly speaks and writes about them. During my entire conscious life I wanted to be a citizen and now I want to remain one. For me, personally, this means to be a person who exercises his rights to express his views and his feelings of pain. When working in *Pahonia*, I was a citizen. These are not just lofty words.

Your Honor, we have not abused the freedom of speech, because it is impossible to abuse something that does not exist in Belarus. Our country's intellectual forces, its writers, scientists, artists, poets and journalists are tending their fields and are not guilty of any crimes. Yet the state mistrusts them to such an extent to appoint an overseer of the intellectual community — a person who hasn't written a single book or even a single article in a newspaper, but now decides which articles may or may not be published. He decides, to my horror, what words should be used by the journalist, so that his readers understand him correctly. Sheer nonsense ! He evaluates the articles in his own way and decides which words may lead to the author's imprisonment.

How then are we, the citizens of this country, to know what is happening if we are prohibited to ask, to get information and discuss the events of this nation?

Mistaken are those who think that this trial is reasonable. According to them, we should have suppressed our conscience and not have expressed our views in a publication when we all know about what we speak and today's political situation. The authorities who don't trust the journalists and don't trust you, their people, either. They regard the people as mundane, unable to discriminate between the good and the bad, and to distinguish which words are used in their figurative sense and which are to be understood the way the state prosecutor sees fit. By design, the readers are prohibited from reading "unnecessary ideas."

How then are we, the citizens of this country, to know what is happening if we are prohibited to ask, to get information and discuss the events of this nation?

This is how I understand this trial.

In Belarus the freedom of speech is guaranteed by law. However, the freedom of the person who expresses and publishes his speech, is not guaranteed anything.

Judging from my own experience, the freeness of speech depends on the arbitrary judgment of a few persons. I have my own opinions of many people. Correct or not, they are my own private, subjective opinions. Just as every normal human being, I have my own opinion of the president. It is my own, subjective opinion. What is wrong or criminal about that ?

Your honor, yesterday, after the honorable prosecutor asked to impose upon me the sentence of two years of limited freedom, I heard many people in this room express their indignation. How is that possible ? Two years for an article consisting of less than 3,000 characters ? No, you are not giving the state prosecutor your full understanding. Because, you see, the article itself is irrelevant here - it provided only a formal dressing for the request. The punishment is for something else: For carrying out a journalistsí responsibilty. Two years is a punishment for the fact that there are newspapers in Belarus that still dare to cover uncomfortable topics on their pages. Two years is a punishment for our daring to forget even for a second that in Belarus words like meanness, lawlessness, injustice, cowardice, sycophancy, cynicism, revenge and political investigation are still very topical. Two years because we did not commit perjury and have not taken any blame.. Two years because you, our friends, have been here every day of this trial and possibly have not allowed the prosecutor to say and do what he could have said and done, if you had not been here. Two years, Your Honor, is the punishment for 10 months of persisting in our innocence, and because we did not leave our country despite the closeness and accessibility of international borders. Those who thought up this trial, probably expected us to take the easy way out. Two years of limited freedom were necessary because the stateís accusation was exposed as impotent. Having put chestnuts in the fire, it had to continue the matter by ignoring laws and substituting meaningless words for the lack of evidence. This is the real reason for the two years of limited freedom.

Your Honor ! In your presence, in your halls and chambers and at the expense and wasting of your time and resources the state prosecutor is attempting to justify himself and his disgraceful actions by shifting the responsibility for this trial on your shoulders.

Your Honor ! Our defenders have repeatedly asked you to acquit us. And today, I still have no doubts that it would have been the only verdict compatible with the law and human conscience. Thanks to this trial I have gained a good knowledge of the Criminal Code of Practice. However, I am also familiar with the practicalities of litigation and today, in my last statement, I do not ask Your Honor for anything.

I ask Your Honor to pass a verdict on our case, since the prosecutor's office and the intelligence services seem to be already fully involved. The public has also had its say at this trial. Your Honor has seen, heard and read it - and it is in our favor.

What will the court say ? I do not know. I can only guess that it is aware of two things: that I am innocent and that I will not accept any charity in the form of compromises.

Source: *Naša Niva*, 28 June, 2002.

Belarusians in Today's Poland

By Sakrat Janovič

Belarusians in today's Poland have their own thousand-year history in the Padlašša region (pronounced *Padla'sh-sha*). Numbering about 200,000, they inhabit a territory encompassing the east and center of the present Podlasie wojwodship including its capital Bialystok (*Bielastok* in Belarusian). They even predominate in some towns, such as the district centers Bielsk and Hajnauka. The ethnic roots of Padlašša Belarusians, as well as other Belarusians, are a Slavic-Baltic synthesis, originating in the crossover settlement of Slavic and Yacviah (Baltic) tribes.



The region of Padlašša

The present Podlasian wojwodship occupies the territory of the former Yatvez region. It became the site of today's Belarusian minority in Poland as the result of the postwar demarcation of the Polish-Soviet border according to the 1945 Yalta agreement on new European borders. The mutual repatriation agreement between Poland and the Soviet Union after 1945 affected Padlašša Belarusians in a minimal fashion. It was voluntary, since local Belarusians presented no problem for the newly Communist Poland or the Soviet Union. This was due to the almost complete lack of national consciousness among the local Belarusians; consequently there was no conflict of political interests.

Social issues were more important here. 99% of Belarusians at that time were small farmers whose attitudes were mainly formed by caution and fear of the Soviet "kolkhozes" (collective farms). People who left the region ("repatriated") for the Soviet Belarus were limited to those connected with the prewar communist movement in Poland or with Soviet guerilla activities during the German occupation.

Although local Belarusians were not particularly fond of Poland, they respected its relative democracy and greater freedom, as compared with Soviet terrorism and permanent poverty. This was also the main cause of the more numerous "Polish repatriation" from the Soviet Union. People were simply trying to escape the Soviets, often concealing their Belarusian origins and even more so their Orthodox faith, which in the Soviet Union automatically defined a person as one of their "own", and not "Polish." During this flight process, Belarusians were anxious to use any available documents issued by the prewar Polish administration.

In the summer of 1944, when German armies retreated to the Vistula River in Poland, the situation in Padlašša began to stabilize, although thousands of Polish national guerillas ("Armia Krajowa") were still hiding in the forests. At this time, the survival of teaching cadres enabled the reestablishment of a network of Belarusian elementary and middle schools. It amounted to a restoration of the 1939-41 school system of the Bielastok voblasc of the Belarusian Soviet Republic.

However, after 1945 the postwar Polish administration liquidated this system by force. The majority of Padlašša Belarusians did not resist this action. The traditional farmers' community, rooted in the 19th century serfdom village mentality, was mostly indifferent to Polish or Belarusian national ideas, and to the education of their own children. Only schoolteachers fought for Belarusian schools — with little support from their own society. The most stubborn pedagogues were simply forced to emigrate from Poland — a move supported by Soviet secret services that were not interested in a Belarusian enclave near the Soviet Union's western borders that could impede the russification of the western regions of Soviet Belarus.

However, in 1949 the Polish administration allowed a gradual renewal of Belarusian schools in Padlašša. Why? This has remained a secret until now. The growth of Belarusian cultural potential in the region was clearly not in the interest of the Soviet Union and "People's Poland" had to take this into account. All this confused the people; one year, Belarusian schools were closed, and the next year they were allowed and even encouraged. The availability of Belarusian-language education raised the level of Belarusian civic and cultural activities. Amateur choral groups, even theaters, multiplied, usually created by music instructors and directors of church choirs. Local authorities also helped by assigning funds for instruments, costumes and stage decorations — offering facilities and transport free of charge.

In 1958, during the period of political thaw, the need arose for a larger-scale Belarusian organization — a confederation of the spontaneous cultural circles that would be able to publish their repertoires etc. It would be a non-governmental entity, yet completely devoted to the Communist party and its censorship. As often happens in Belarusian history, the higher authorities decided everything for everyone.

In February 1958, Warsaw issued a directive to establish the Belarusian Civic-Cultural Association (BKHT) with a mass membership. At the same time, the newspaper *NIVA* (patterned after the newspaper *NAŠA NIVA*, published in Vilnia in 1905-1916) began publication. Due to the efforts of Professor Antonina Obrembska, Warsaw University soon opened a faculty of Belarusian philology to prepare the teaching staff for Belarusian-language schools in the Bielastok wojwodship. In Bielastok, Belarusian philology was also in a correspondence institute, with instructors from Miensk participating. In 1958 the Bielastok radio station began weekly broadcasts in Belarusian. A literary circle, *Biełavieža*, as well as a scholarly circle, was also established, associated with the newspaper *NIVA*.

In 1970, with the ascent of the Communist Party secretary Edward Gierek, the Polish state changed its course.

The Polish state set about to build a "Polish socialism." The Communist party hierarchy was now intent on unifying and polonizing the Bielastok region. Although the facade of both the BKHT and the schools had to remain for diplomatic reasons, the government limited its support of the BKHT and its associated informal structures. It also cut the subsidies of publications, leading to the virtual liquidation of the Belarusian scholarly circle. The new policy also resulted in the liquidation of the professional music-and-dance group *Lavonicha*, popular in all of Poland. Warsaw was issuing "administrative" directives designed to limit the growth of the BKHT. Special emphasis was placed on making the teaching of the Belarusian language in "Belarusian" schools not mandatory. If they wanted to keep Belarusian language courses in schools, parents would have to submit a written request.

In the 1980s the Solidarity movement erupted in Poland. The power struggle between its supporters and the Communist party apparatus produced a political Belarusian card, used by both sides with mixed success. Due to the traditional leftist sympathies of the Belarusian population, the Bielastok region experienced a division of electorates: the "Polish" electorate, consisting of supporters of the anticommunist and clerical Solidarity, and the "Belarusian" one that voted for the "reds" — alarmed by the hyper-catholic nature of Solidarity (especially in the Bielastok region.)

The deciding feature defining people's allegiance to each group was not their national origin, but their religion, or confession: Roman Catholics tended to identify with Poles and the Orthodox with Belarusians. Local Catholic priests blocked any Solidarity influence on the Orthodox population. A wall arose between the two communities that did not, and had no desire to, deal with each other. This state of affairs has persisted to this day.

The decade of 1980s witnessed a rupture in the organizational structure of the Belarusian minority. The students' milieu produced new formal and informal associations, the most vital of which was the Belarusian Students' Association (BAS). New Belarusian publications kept appearing from time to time — thanks to the partially autonomous status of the universities. Although these publications were mostly irregular and short-lived, the regular and currently popular monthly *CZASOPIS* has survived until now.

The political climate of the famous "Round Table" (which defined the transition of power from the Communists to Solidarity in 1989) favored the appearance of the "Belarusian Club", whose purpose was to prepare the future membership of a systematic political party. This was formally created later, in February 1990, as the "Belarusian Democratic Union." Although it was usually defeated in parliamentary elections, it became quite successful in local self-government elections, winning almost all of the seats in some electoral districts. After these victories, the Bielastok wojwodship authorities, controlled by the Catholic church, took their revenge on these districts, especially in the matter of public finances.

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed a certain stabilization of Belarusian political structures in Poland. The newly introduced market economy conditions put an end to artificial government-subsidized structures and pushed aside the ambitions of individual "Belarusian functionaries." The old apparatus of the Polish People's Republic also disappeared. On the other hand, practically all Belarusian civic activities in Poland are funded by grants and foundations, including those from abroad. The current Belarusian minority has split on the basis of generations; children of BKHT members did not follow their parents, and, instead, formed their own associations, united in an umbrella organization — the "Belarusian Union."

The weekly *NIVA* is still being published by the Polish Ministry of Culture, which also provides support for the monthly *CZASOPIS*, and the periodicals *PRAVINCYJA* and *TERMAPILY*, an annual collection of literary works. The latter two serve, not only the Belarusian minority in Poland, but also the Belarusian people in general. The literary association "Villa Sokrates" publishes an annual collection of works entitled *Annus Albarutenicus*. The "Belarusian Union" in Bielastok helps to produce the radio program *RACYJA*, whose daily broadcasts can also be heard in the Republic of Belarus. A similar function is performed by the Belarusian service of Radio Polonia in Warsaw.

There is no purely Belarusian-language school in the Padlašša region. In several dozens of village schools, the Belarusian language is being taught as an optional subject. Two general lyceums (middle schools) in Hajnauka and Bielsk teach the Belarusian language as a mandatory subject.

In the area of literature, Poland's Belarusians seem to have scored the most success by gradually producing something that can be defined as an independent Polish Belarusian literature. The works of Padlašša Belarusians have also been published abroad: in Great Britain, Germany, Austria, and Italy. Poland has become a country of literature in two languages — in Polish and Belarusian. Thanks to the efforts of Professor Jerzy Gedrojc, the university in Bielastok has opened a faculty of Belarusian culture. This institution partially realizes Professor Gedrojc's idea of providing higher education in Belarusian that would be equal to the Polish language education in Poland in its quality and authority. Or, it could be a step toward creating a Belarusian University Abroad that would provide the opportunity to acquire a European education in Belarusian for young Belarusians from Poland and from Belarus proper.

Source: *Naša Niva,* May 2002

Sakrat Janovič is a writer, publicist and civic leader in the Belarusian Padlašša region

Youth Forms Anti-imperial Alliance

Miensk, October 2002 — Youth divisions of Christian Democratic, National Democratic and Conservative parties from seven Eastern European countries formed an Anti-imperial Alliance to defend independence of their states from the imperialistic designs voiced lately by the government of the Russian Federation.

Young people from these countries joined the Alliance: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Belarus is represented by **Malady Front** (Young Front)

Source: *Belarusian Digest*, October 2002.

ECONOMY

Attracting Foreign Investment in Belarus: A Forlorn Cause?

By David Marples

Introduction

In early May 2002, the government of Belarus introduced a new program to raise foreign investment in the republic. The government hopes to increase the portion of foreign investment in its GDP from the current 19 to 26-28%.

The May decision follows previously announced plans by the Belarusian authorities to transform several government-owned businesses into joint-stock companies by 1 August and to sell off 49.9% of the stakes in lots of 10% to various bidders. The companies include both oil refineries and chemical plants located for the most part in the eastern regions of Belarus. Of the potential foreign investors, the majority are Russian, and include particularly some of the major oil companies. In March, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov revealed plans to deepen the economic links between Russia and Belarus by bringing tax and customs laws into unison, setting a single price for energy products, and in effect establishing a single economic space between the two republics, under the auspices of the Russia-Belarus Union. Belarusian Prime Minister Henadz Navitsky qualified this agreement with the remark that Belarus would maintain a controlling influence over the larger domestic companies.

Also in March, the company SLAVNEFT announced that it planned to invest $1 billion into the oil and chemical industries of Belarus. SLAVNEFT has for some time been the major player in the Belarusian oil processing industry. Founded in August 1994 (almost immediately after Lukashenka became president of Belarus), it is a joint stock company in which the Russian government holds the major shares (45% belongs to the Russian Ministry of State Property and 30% to the Russian Fund of Federal Property), but in which Belarus also has a strong interest (10.8%). Thus the two announcements would seem to herald a vigorous role for SLAVNEFT in the reported privatization of Belarusian oil and chemical industry.

Background

Belarus has long been an importer of oil resources from Russia in addition to being a conduit for Russian oil and gas exports to Western Europe. It imports approximately 80% of its energy resources and has accumulated substantial oil debts to Russia despite paying lower than the market prices for Russian oil. Over the past five years there have been several attempts by Russian oil companies to gain control over the Belarusian oil processing plants at Rechitsa and Navapolatsk. Thus far Belarus has resisted Russian control and the Lukashenka regime has insisted that it is unwilling to allow foreign (i.e., Russian ownership) of Belarusian heavy industry.

Siarhiej HAJDUKIEVIČ:

"We are focused on a new presidential election"

Siarhiej Hajdukievič, *leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was a prominent figure in last year's presidential campaign. He was one of the three candidates put on the voting ballot.*

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Belarus was initially a branch of Zhirinovsky's LDP in Russia.

Some of Mr. Hajdukievič's views, expressed in an interview with BelaPAN's political analyst:

..The Russian political elite re-evaluated the place and the role of its country in the modern world. Russia became a full-fledged partner of the world's leading powers. Thanks to Putin it jumped on the bandwagon of the international terrorism combat. In this situation, to support Lukashenka, an outcast for the world political elite, would be to stain Russia's reputation. I dare suggest that if the terrorist attack on New York had been made in May, not in September 2001, Belarus' president would now be the man you are talking to (sic !)

... The Russians have offered us democracy without Lukashenka but within their Federation. The political opposition should say that Belarus will never agree to such a variant. If Lukashenka wants to defend sovereignty he should join us. He should ask us for help. It is up to us how to use the situation. Why should I feel discomfort and worry for Lukashenka? Let him feel discomfort. The political elite, political parties, the [non-state] media should maintain more contacts now and be together. Because we have a unique chance for getting power.

... We should do real actions. Reach out to people. Participate in the local elections.

.... There is no need for the opposition to unite. Is unification of the LDP, UCP [United Civic Party] and BPF [Belarusian Popular Front] possible? It is not. Joint actions are. But unification is not. Because our parties have different ideologies. There can only be the pooling of efforts toward one goal — the fight against dictatorship.

Siarhiej HAJDUKIEVIČ— Born in 1954 ... Held various command positions in the Soviet Armed Forces from 1976 to 1991 ... Retired while holding the rank of colonel ... Has been chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party since 1995.

Source: http://www.naviny.by/

In August 2001, Mikhail Gutsiriyev, then head of SLAVNEFT met with President Lukashenka and the two decided to form a new joint venture known as the Slavic oil company, dividing the capital 50:50 between the company and the Belarusian government. The reported goal was the exploitation of the oilfield at Tailokovsky, the reserves of which are estimated at 62 million tons. Thus in a number of respects, the second term of Lukashenka's presidency appears to herald a belated change of attitude of the Belarusian government toward foreign investment and development of both reserves and existing industry.

Analysis

There are, however, some limiting factors. First of all, SLAVNEFT has become a battleground for competing oligarchs, who operate for the most part outside government control. In May 2002, at a meeting of shareholders, Gutsiriyev lost his position as head of the company to vice-president Yury Sukhanov. Reports suggest that the change of leadership was directly linked to the forthcoming privatization of 20% of SLAVNEFT shares that is scheduled to take place later in 2002. Following the change of leadership, Gutsiriyev ordered an armed takeover of the SLAVNEFT offices. This confrontation, reminiscent of the gangland skirmishes of the early 1990s, occurred during the visit of US president George W. Bush to Moscow. The conflict demonstrated the relative impotence of the Putin regime—the majority shareholder—in the face of a titanic struggle between two oligarchs.

Second, major Russian oil companies are unlikely to be satiated with a minority interest in Belarusian companies, many of which require modernization in order to meet international standards. Belarus hopes to attract up to $41 billion of foreign investment over the next eight years, a sum that appears highly unrealistic. One of the largest players, LUKOIL, has already made it plain that it wishes to acquire a bigger stake in companies prior to any significant outlay of funds. Such companies also face a myriad of restrictive regulations from the Belarusian government, which has generally tried to limit foreign investment in recent years. There is therefore at present insufficient incentive for major companies to take up the Belarusian offer of investment.

Third, despite Russian president Vladimir Putin's ostensible lack of control over SLAVNEFT, he remains the major player at the state level. Moreover, in June, during a speech at the Bakulev Cardiological Surgery Centre in Moscow, Putin made an unexpectedly harsh attack on the Russia-Belarus Union, undermining the position of the Lukashenka regime. Putin criticized the concept of integration of the two states, and stated his view that Belarus, with an economy only 3% the size of that of Russia, could not expect to maintain its rights of veto, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. He implied that the position of Belarus within a future Union could be no more than that of a territory or district of the Russian Federation.

Four days later, on 16 June, the Russian position appeared to become even firmer when the state secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union, Pavel Borodin, described the draft constitutional act provided by the Belarusian side as "foolish" and "nonsense." Lukashenka, in turn, claimed that he was insulted by Putin's remarks, which implied that Belarus was a "freeloader" off Russia, and that Putin wished to incorporate Belarus as a 90th subject of the Federation. Subsequently, former Russian president Boris Yeltsin and his former Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov tried to placate the Belarusian leadership. Neither, however, had any endorsement from the Russian government.

Prospects

For Belarus, an open rift with Russia constitutes a setback for the government, which is already fearful of Russia's growing rapprochement with the West. The May announcement may have been linked to fears that once Russia joins the WTO, common practices of the past—such as barter trading with Belarus—will be ended, and Belarus may lose other benefits from trade with a close friend and neighbour. Belarus would like to follow Russia into the WTO, and the spring initiatives may be no more than a means of raising the country's economic prestige with the WTO countries. Foreign investment from sources other than Russia has been meagre. The United States, the Netherlands, and Germany are the only partners of significance. The former has provided the two major players, in Coca Cola and McDonald's, both of which have had difficulties with the government, in addition to the now defunct Ford plant.

A dramatic change in Belarusian economic policy appears unlikely, but Belarus may come under increasing pressure from Russia to permit greater intrusion from Russian companies. Belarus has survived for the past eight years mainly through its favoured trading status with Russia, which has allowed the country to import goods, particularly energy resources, through a barter arrangement. Belarusian industry has made few advances in the independence period, but without the prop of Russian support, its economic footing is shaky. On the other hand, the Lukashenka administration is likely to resist any form of shock therapy, particularly in agriculture (rural voters are the mainstay of support for the government). The spring initiatives may signal an acute need for foreign investment, but they are also a reflection of changes in the political climate and the changing world role of the erstwhile close partner, Russia.

Dr. David Marples is Professor of History, Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK.

" Small traders are [still] able to work with some profit in the current situation, and for this reason alone, the authorities should have supported them. But it seems that for Lukashenka, the ideal of a citizen is [that of] a boozer who sits in a gutter, does not do anything, is not interested in anything, and does not aspire to anything." — A Belarusian outdoor-market vendor commenting on the ongoing strike of Belarusian small traders against what they say are the government's fiscal and administrative attempts to destroy small business in the country; quoted by the Moscow-based *Novye izvestiya* on 3 October. (RFE/RL Polnd, Belarus and Ukraine Report, 8 October 2002)

Who is Doing a (Financial) Favor for Whom in Belarus-Russia Union?

By Jan Maksymiuk

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 9 September — the first anniversary of the inauguration of his second presidential term --appeared live on Russia's NTV television, where he reiterated once again that neither the incorporation of Belarus by Russia nor an EU-type integration is an acceptable unification scenario for either country.

The Belarusian leader also touched upon economic issues and tried to identify the "rich people" in Russia who, in his opinion, are impeding the development of the Russia-Belarus union on an equal footing and are interested in exacerbating relations between Lukashenka and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Belarusian president said Russia's Gazprom is pressing Putin into making Lukashenka more "compliant" regarding the privatization of Belarusian enterprises. "Everybody expected us to give our possessions, our modern enterprises, for free," Lukashenka said. "Nothing will go for free in Belarus. So they have started to press Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] into making Lukashenka more compliant. No one is allowed to talk with me in this way."

Lukashenka complained that in terms of business and trade relations, Russia treats Belarus (its main trade partner) worse than other post-Soviet states

Lukashenka said Gazprom is one of the Russian businesses that want to get hold of Belarusian possessions — specifically, Belarus's gas pipelines — by applying such pressure on the Kremlin. "They [Gazprom] reproach us for hampering this [privatization] process," Lukashenka said. "According to a Belarusian-Russian agreement of 1996 or 1995, Gazprom is obliged to supply us with 30 million cubic meters of gas per year, but today it supplies only 18 million cubic meters. I say: Why do you not implement this agreement? Why do you demand that we give you our possessions?" Lukashenka complained that in terms of business and trade relations, Russia treats Belarus (its main trade partner) worse than other post-Soviet states: "Why have we suddenly become for Russia worse than Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, and even Western states? Is it because we look after Russia's interests? Is it because in 1996 I granted $200 million worth of tax breaks for Gazprom during the construction of the [Belarusian stretch of the Yamal-Europe] gas pipeline? Why do you behave toward us in such a way?"

Gazprom reacted to Lukashenka's pronouncements on 11 September. Gazprom deputy head Vitalii Savelev said on NTV that Gazprom is currently working with Belarus on a "charitable basis." Savelev recalled that earlier this year, Gazprom extended its domestic prices for gas supplied to Belarus (Belarus has to pay some $24 for 1,000 cubic meters of gas, as do Russian consumers in the bordering Smolensk Oblast). However, Savelev went on, in contrast to Russian regions, Belarus does not pay for Russian gas. Savelev said Belarus' debt for Russian gas supplies has now reached $300 million.

Former Belarusian Foreign Trade Minister Mikhail Marynich added an interesting detail to the issue of Russian gas supplies to Belarus. "Irrespective of the fact that Russia introduced domestic tariffs for gas supplies to Belarus, our enterprises have not felt any [financial relief]," Marynich told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 13 September. "For our enterprises the price of gas remains the same as before: $49-$50 for 1,000 cubic meters.... It is hard to say where the sums [earned by the Belarusian government on the domestic distribution of Russian gas] are directed, but they definitely do not support the economy."

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, Sept. 17, 2002

Can Market Vendors Become Force of Influence in Belarus?

By Kiryl Pazniak

In their struggle for favorable economic conditions and decent living standards — for business directly depends on the population's purchasing power — Belarusian market vendors use different methods, from strikes to appeals directly to the head of state and other officials. However neither protest campaigns nor appeals have so far brought about the desired result. The government is reluctant to embrace private business with its numerous problems.

Business environment in Belarus continues to be unfavorable, since government declarations on the upcoming economic liberalization were not followed by real actions. With an unbearable tax burden, all-out fiscal checkups and the pressure to donate money for state-run projects, small and medium-sized businesses are going through bad times. In addition, the state propaganda machine instigated by Belarusian ruler, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, is labeling market vendors as black marketeers and swindlers.

Yet virtually the whole Belarusian population, including blue-collar workers and officials with the Economy Ministry, buy clothes and foodstuffs at markets which offer a wider and cheaper range of goods than state-run shops. This detail alone evidences that market vendors, no matter how badly they are criticized, are an important element of the Belarusian economy.

The negative attitude of the government to small and medium-sized businesses is well understandable. It cannot be otherwise when the country's economy is run by command methods and few market tools are used only as a cover or as a forced measure in industries in complete decline. At the same time, the authorities fear that

businesspeople may turn into a developed social class and an influential political force, i.e. tycoons or national bourgeoisie that will fund political parties and thus lobby their interests.

Repressive economic conditions should galvanize the formation of an active position among market vendors, but this process is undermined by civil non-freedoms and harassment of trade union leaders of small and medium-sized businesses. Suffice it to say that most protest campaigns of Belarusian market vendors in the past were one-day "token" events without any effect. Strikes that were proclaimed as open-ended did not last more than two weeks and stopped, the organizers said, in a gesture of goodwill toward consumers.

However, the market vendors' plans to stage a mass open-ended strike this fall should make the authorities anxious. On July 31, market vendors staged a one-day strike nationwide that involved 150,000 people. Besides, they are going to use other means too. Valery Levaneuski, leader of the unregistered strike committee, sent letters to Lukashenka and his aide for economic matters, Siarhej Tkachou, urging them to discuss problems of small and medium-sized businesses. According to Levaneuski, it depends on the Presidential Administration whether their problems will be discussed at the government level. The Council of Ministers, in particular, the Economy and Trade Ministries, he said, are ready for a dialogue but are waiting for a go-ahead from the Administration.

Levaneuski stressed in his letters that a number of amendments to business regulations that have been passed or are planned are very discouraging for small businesses. The amendments, such as the introduction of settlement accounts, cash registers and sales account documents, as well as the double increase in the fixed monthly tax amounts (a single tax), will badly hit vendors. More than a half of them, the letter says, will have to close down as a result. They called on the government to "abolish all planned amendments to regulations that deteriorate business conditions and to hold an open discussion on the problems."

According to the strike committee, 80 percent of Belarusian vendors are ready to go on a national strike with suspending tax payments and demand Lukashenka's resignation unless the government takes measures to resolve the conflict. September 1 was named in the letters to Lukashenka and his aide as a date for the open-ended strike in case the government continues to ignore vendors' demands and refuses to talk. The strike was later postponed to October 1 (but part of market vendors were on a strike on September 1). The organizing committee is planning to stage a one-day token strike on September 11 with demands of resignation of Lukashenka and some ministers and officials who hinder the development of small and medium-sized businesses in Belarus. The date was chosen on purpose as vendors qualify the government actions as "economic terrorism."

According to the organizers, the strike was postponed after government officials promised that "there would be no changes to the single tax decree and that the tax increase scheduled for September 1 was abolished." These, they said, were the "major reasons of the upcoming strike." Besides, the government is allegedly ready to consider a number of other vendors' proposals.

It is not unlikely that the government who branded market vendors as "crooks" and "lousy fleas" really decided to start a dialog. If market vendors do stage an open-ended strike as planned, i.e. with tax payments suspended, this can do considerable harm to the state. Changes to the business regulations will force many of them to shut up and join the army of the unemployed.

An even greater concern for the authorities is that the protest campaign scheduled for October 1 will have not only economic but also political slogans. It means that despite persecution Belarusian business is shaping into an organized and menacing force.

Source: *Belorussskiye Novosti*, September 2, 2002 **(http://www.naviny.by/)**

Belarusians Abroad

The 25th Convention of Belarusians of North America

The 25th Convention of Belarusians of North America was held on August 31 and September 1, 2002 in New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A. The traditional biennial event attracted several hundred representatives of Belarusian organizations in the United States and Canada, and numerous guests from Belarus. It also marked this year its 50th anniversary.

The Convention was focused on the theme "The Role of Belarusian Diaspora in Democratization of Belarus and in Preservation of its Independence." The first day of proceedings continued with a symposium on this general theme. It consisted of 3 discussion groups or "round tables". Following issues were discussed:

— Analysis of the present political situation in Belarus and perspectives for democratization.

— Contribution of Belarusians of North America in the struggle for a democratic and independent Belarus, and

— The issues of changing generations among Belarusians abroad and the preservation of their cultural and historical heritage.

Sunday, September 1st began with divine services in the church of Mother of God of Žyrovicy in Highland Park, N. J. Then, during a gala banquet, the gathering was addressed by:

— President of the Rada(Council) of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR), Ms. Ivonka Survilla,

— Mr. Anton Šukielojc from the Belarusian-American Association.

— Mr. Piotra Murzionak from the Association of Belarusians in Canada., and Convention's honor guests from Belarus

— Mr. Hienadz Sahanovič, a historian and the editor of the *Belarusian Historical Review,* and

— Ms. Valancina Tryhubovič, the chairwoman of the international civic association "Belarusian Perspectives."

An interesting lecture on the latest developments in Belarus was delivered by Mr. Siarhiej Navumčyk, the vice-president of the BNR Rada.

Excerpts from the address by Mr. S. Navumcyk, delivered at the 25th Convention of Belarusians of North America.

... For Belarusians of the diaspora who were brought up on democratic traditions, on respect for the rights of the individual, on the freedom of speech, these concepts are indivisibly connected with the aspiration for an independent Belarus.

The alternative "Belarus as a democratic free-market zone within the Russian Federation — or as an independent country under the dictator Lukashenka "(**Editor's note**: who is bent on annihilating Belarusian culture and history) appears artificial to them.

... The leaders of our diaspora are meeting American politicians and reminding them that the United States, along with Great Britain, guaranteed the Independence of Belarus, after Belarus agreed to withdraw nuclear arms from its territory.

Agreeing to withdraw nuclear arms, Belarusian leadership of that time saved today's American leadership a severe political headache. This is why the Belarusian diaspora in the United States feels that it has a moral right to demand that Washington fulfills the promised guarantees.

"REQUIEM"- 2002 in PRAGUE

Joint action "Requiem-2002", marking the second anniversary since the killing of the Ukrainian journalist Georgy Gongadze and third – since the disappearance of the prominent Belarusian opposition figures Viktor Hanchar and Anatol Krasouski was held today, on September 16, in Prague.

The action was held by the "Belarusian Community Abroad" and the Ukrainian political organizations in the Czech Republic. The organization members claim that Belarus and Ukraine experience similar problems and the Ukrainian democrats always upheld their Belarusian colleagues during the street rallies in Minsk. So, at the joint meeting it was determined to picket the Ukrainian embassy at 10-12a.m. The event attracted 32 individuals.

Today the BCA passed a statement of support of the All-Ukrainian opposition action, held in Kiev. Following comes the text of the statement: "The Ukrainian president Kuchma was second only to Putin to recognize the results of the last year's presidential elections in Belarus of Sept. 9. He once again confirmed his friendly ties with the dictator Lukashenka. ...Tell me who your friend is and I will tell you who you are – there's such a saying in our country. So we demand that the individuals who occupy top presidential posts in Belarus and Ukraine give them up now!"

Charter97 Press Center, 16 September 2002.

Third Conference of Belarusians in Baltic States

This conference took place on 13-14 July in Vilnia (Vilnius), the capital of Lithuania. This year it was especially important, since the main topic of discussions were the efforts of Baltic countries to enter the European Union, and the possible consequences of this event for the neighboring Belarus.

Depending on the foreign policy conducted by the Baltic states, that might be necessary to satisfy EU's entry requirements, or their own national interests, Belarus may move closer to the family of European democracies, or move away from it - nearer to its eastern neighbor — Russia.

The conference attracted many Belarusian political figures and civic leaders: Zianon Pazniak, Stanislau Šuškievič, Radzim Harecki for the World Alliance Backauščyna, former Belarusian ambassador to the U.N. Hienadz Buraukin, Dr. Aleh Trusau from the Belarusian Language Society, the Young Front leader Paval Sieviaryniec and others.

Belarusian diaspora was represented by guests from Latvia, Estonia, Russia (Kaliningrad enclave), France, Belgium, Poland, Czech Republic, Great Britain.

The Rada (Council) of the Belarusian Democratic Republic was represented by President Ivonka Survilla, and the vice-president Siarhiej Navumčyk

The host country Lithuania delegated to the conference influential leaders of its parliament: its deputy vice-speaker Česlavas Jursenas, former parliament chairman Vytautas Landsbergis, and Vaclau Stankievič — head of the parliamentary committee for NATO relations. (The latter is a Belarusian by birth). President Valdas Adamkus sent his greetings.

A special session examined the political situation in Belarus.

The delegates also honored the memory of the Belarusian national hero Kastus Kalinouski, executed in Vilnia in 1864. A wreath of white-red-white flowers was placed under his cross.



Vilnia — honoring the memory of Kastus Kalinouski

Coalition in Defense of Democracy and Human Rights in Belarus

9 River Road Highland Park, NJ 08904
Tel.: (732) 254-6527; Fax: (732) 254-8951
E-mail: a.silwano@verizon.net

Press Release September 9, 2002

September 9, 2002, marks the first anniversary of the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus by which Alaksandr Lukashenka prolonged his dictatorial rule for another five-year period. The past year has shown that the situation in Belarus continues to worsen. Disappearances of political opponents of the regime remain unsolved. Civic groups are hampered in their activities. Arrests and imprisonments of peaceful dissenters have become almost daily occurrences. Independent media have been continuously harassed or shut down. All these negative phenomena have been going on in spite of severe criticism of Lukashenka's practices in Western quarters, both official and unofficial, especially the United States of America.

It is indicative, however, that not a single word of disapproval of the Lukashenka regime's practices came from the Russian government. It looks that the Kremlin in its policies toward Belarus is guided by the principle "The Worse, the Better." Indeed, Lukashenka's brutal ways and retarded approaches to the economy serve Moscow's covert goal – to reinforce in Belarus a longing for union with a "reformed and more democratica" Russia. This strategy has become quite evident on August 14, 2002, when Russia's President Putin came up with his proposal to simply incorporate Belarus into the Russian Federation. Is there a sinister collusion between the KGB chief in the Kremlin and his agents around Lukashenka to liquidate Belarus' independence?

In view of what has happened in Belarus since Alaksandr Lukashenka had re-elected himself to a second term, we call on the American Government to continue its pressure on the official Minsk on behalf of democratic freedoms for a sovereign and independent Belarus. We strongly endorse Congressman Christopher Smith's bill for a support of democracy in Belarus. And we pledge to continue our efforts toward securing the Belarusan people their rightful place among the world's free nations.

TWO THIRDS of YOUNG BELARUSIANS WISH TO EMIGRATE

According to the NISEPI poll, 34,7% Belarusians are inclined to believe that the social-economic situation in the country will deteriorate, while only 16,9% are still harboring illusions that the situation might somehow change for the better. For the young generation pessimism is even more typical: 41% of the polled, aged 18-29, are convinced that the situation will deteriorate all the more and only 10,2% preserve faith in improvement. As a result, many are willing to emigrate abroad. 38,3% of all surveyed respondents wish they could leave the country, while among those, aged 18-29, their percentage equals to 63,4%.

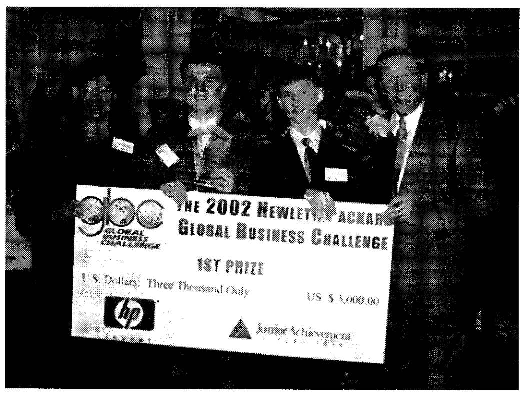
Charter`97 Press Center, 09 October 2002

Congratulations to the Winning Team !

Team AMOS of Belarus was crowned champion of the 2002 Hewlett-Packard Global Business Challenge on Thursday evening, August 15 at a gala banquet at the University Club in San Diego, California, U.S.A. Announcement of the Championship Round results was the culmination of a spirited day of competition between the eight finalist teams.

During the competition, the eight finalist teams managed a multinational company with operations in five countries, each with its own currency, interest rates, tax rates and market conditions. The all-day, face-to-face Championship Round was an intense experience as students grappled with developing a strategy for their operations in five countries, including balancing tariffs and transportation costs against local production and responding to changing conditions and market forces around the world. Against a backdrop of flags from their countries, each team spent the day in its own "office" equipped with an HP network terminal through which decisions were entered and results obtained.

Team AMOS achieved its success by opening in all five countries and applying a consistent strategy worldwide. They sold everywhere, but only constructed factories in two countries, supplying other countries with imports. Though other teams had higher profits in individual countries, Team AMOS had the most consistent performance around the world and their consolidated results pushed them over the top.



Uladzimier Ždanovič and Jury Zinkievič of Team AMOS from Belarus show off their first-place trophies and grand prize of US $3,000.

The **Global Business Challenge** is a computer game, based on the theories of company management and business competition. Each of the competing teams consists of 2 persons between ages of 16 and 22. The teams

act as managers of virtual businesses and compete using computer terminals and Internet communications. The competition is organized annually by the Harvard Computing Center under the sponsorship of Hewlett-Packard company.

This year 1125 teams from 65 countries participated in the competition. Belarus was represented by 20 teams - mostly from Miensk high schools. Most of them were coached by Mr. Paval Bincarouski and Ms. Volha Zaujalava, instructors at the Belarus State Economic University. The Belarusian teams were named after biblical personages and Old Testament books, such as Amos, Ezekiel, Exodus, Jeremiah.

The winning AMOS team consisted of Jury Zinkievič, a student at the Economic University, and Uladzimier Ždanovič, a graduate of Miensk Gymnasium # 1.

The multinational team CYBER43 placed second, followed by the Romanian teams BMW and Matrix2, with team AGGA from Lithuania in fifth place.

Source: http://www.harvassoc.com/hpgbc/newsletter3.htm

Additional Note: On basis of their performance winning performance, the members of the AMOS team are eligible to enroll in any U.S. university. However, they have decided to continue their studies in Miensk. They also revealed their simple "recipe" for curing the ailing economy of Belarus: more attention should be paid to the views and ideas of young specialists who grew up under new conditions. (*Argumenty i fakty v Belarusi*, Sept. 4, 2002),

November 3, 1882

Writer **Jakub Kolas** (Kanstancin Mickievic), a great Belarusian poet, was born in Akincycy, near the town of Stoupcy. Deceased in 1956.

Jakub Kolas was the author of some of the classics of Belarusian literature, prose writer and poet, teacher, activist of the Rebirth Movement, lexicographer, and academician. Together with Janka Kupala, Jakub Kolas is the founder of modern Belarusian literature. His literary pseudonym Kolas means "ear of grain," indicating the poet's connection with the land and the lot of the peasantry.

Kolas contributed poetry and short stories to *Nasa Niva*, and authored two classical narrative poems, *Novaja ziamla* (New Land) and *Symon — muzyka* (Symon the musician). The two narrative poems mentioned above depict daily country life in colorful detail and also reflect strivings for freedom and cultural emancipation. *Novaja ziamla* is justly called an encyclopedia of Belarusian life.

Belarus & the World

Conference of Center Right Parties

The 4th conference of right-wing and centrist parties of Central and Eastern Europe took place on September 28-29, 2002 in Prague, Czech Republic. The event attracted representatives of 15 countries.

Belarus was represented by:
the leaders of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) **Vincuk Viačorka** and **Lavon Barščeuski,** and the leaders of the United Civic Party **Anatol Labiedzka** and **Jaraslau Ramančuk.**

The conference dealt with the issues of European integration, European security, as well as with the situation of Belarus. It issued a special declaration on the latter subject. We are reprinting excerpts from it below.

The US president George W. Bush greeted the participants of the conference with a brief message, a substantial part of which dealt with the situation in Belarus:

"The electoral process in Belarus isn't democratic, while the political opposition is exposed to harassment. The United States upholds the growth of democracy there. I call on everyone to support all those, who are fighting for the fundamental human rights and freedoms in Belarus."

Commenting on George Bush's speech, chairman of the United Civic Party Anatol Labiedzka said it was a good sign. This fact in itself disperses skeptical statements insinuating that the international community has lost hope concerning Belarus. "Under these circumstances," the UCP press service quoted Anatol Labiedzka as saying: "it would be logical to get some response from Putin as well."

Declaration "On the Situation in Belarus"

(Excerpts)

... The peoples of Central and Eastern Europe remember well their suffering under totalitarian regimes. We know that a communist dictatorship is no lesser evil than a Nazi regime. Our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, were slaughtered, tortured, imprisoned and deported by communists and Nazis alike.

The Center-Right says: Never again. No attempt to establish a totalitarian regime of whatever color will be tolerated in Europe. In addition, we offer our unqualified support to the people of Belarus as they attempt to defeat the forces of totalitarianism and rejoin the family of democratic European nations.

We strongly support the democratic forces in Belarus in their fight for liberty and prosperity. The Belarusian people deserve freedom and democracy as much as any other people in Europe. Just as it was done for us, we stand by them in their attempts to reach democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law in the Republic of Belarus. We are partners in this struggle.

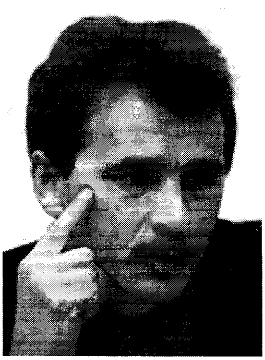
The Center Right

States that sovereignty of Belarus is an indisputable fact of European policy and no referenda on statehood and constitutional questions may be held.

Appeals to Belarusian authorities to start fair negotiations with the democratic opposition parties on vital matters of Belarusian domestic policies.

Urges the authorities to put an end to prosecution of opposition political activists and parties, independent mass media and civil society in general.

Appeals to Belarusian authorities to create a climate of political trust and to immediately release journalists Mikola Markievic, Paval Mazejka and Viktar Ivaskievic.



Anatol Labiedzka

Urges Belarusian authorities to stop criminal prosecution of the leader of the Unite Civic Party Anatol Labiedzka, and to abolish clauses of the Criminal Code that form the legal basis for prosecution of journalists for libeling the president and state officials.

Urges Belarusian authorities to cooperate with the Subcommittee of the Legal Affairs and the Human Rights Commission of the Council of Europe on investigation of missing politicians in Belarus, and to restore relations with OSCE.

Demands from the authorities in Belarus not to pass the highly discriminatory bill "On Religion."

Supports the idea of holding the International Conference on Belarus with the participation of all interested parties, representatives of the international community and organizations.

Proposes to establish a Belarus Initiative program to enhance co-operation and information exchange between CEE and Belarus Center Right to promote freedom, social partnership and democratic development in Belarus.

PACE Assembly session

Strasbourg, Sept. 23, 2002

The Consultative Council of opposition political parties ruled to send the head of the Belarusian Popular Front Vincuk Viačorka to represent the Belarusian opposition at the session of PACE Assembly in Strasbourg on September 23, 2002.

The Council also delegated to Strasbourg the head of the United Civic Party Anatol Labiedzka, the chairwoman of the United Social Democratic Party Valentina Palevikova, and the deputy head of BDSP "Narodnaja Hramada" Uladzimier Nisciuk.

Conclusion of Mr. Viacorka's address to the PACE Assembly in Strasbourg:

Now, is there a way out of this deadlock ? We are convinced that there is , and we are ready to go our part of the way. The democratic opposition in Belarus confirms once again its preparedness to begin negotiations with the government on the crucial matters of our country's present and future. We will be glad to see and fully prepared to acknowledge any substantial progress in any important aspects of the situation in Belarus as soon as any clear steps in this direction are made are made by the government.



Vincuk Viačorka

In the meantime, our immediate demand is that all political sentences imposed on the press be cancelled. We demand the immediate release of the convicted journalists; we also demand freedom for Prof. Bandazevski, an expert in Chernobyl-related issues who is imprisoned on dubious charges.

We demand the repeal of the severe norms of the new Belarus Criminal Code which permit criminal persecution on charges of "defamation" and "insult" of the president and government officials. We demand that the notorious law "On the freedom of denominations and religious organizations" in its present discriminatory form not be passed.

The upcoming local elections will give yet another chance to the authorities of Belarus to improve the situation. It is important to note that although all the main parties are currently preparing to participate in the local elections campaign, our position is this participation should not lead to an international recognition of the present institutions of the regime (including the local ones) as fully legitimized.

We also view with great concern the growing danger that the lack of democracy in Belarus may lead the country to the loss — either formally or de facto — of its independence. It is appalling that now the very future of our country as an independent state has been in fact made a matter of debate. We protest against any attempts or proposals aimed at either violating or putting into question the status of Belarus as of an independent state. We assert that no referenda or elections in Belarus can be viewed as a valid expression of the real will of the nation until substantial democratic changes are secured in all spheres of the country's existence. We urge the Council of Europe, its Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE and the EU to renew the previous practice of policy co-ordination vis-á-vis Belarus. We most explicitly oppose the prospect that our country, which at this point of history finds itself in such difficulties, might be made to disappear from the map of Europe, thus losing its chances to join the family of European democratic nations in the future.

CHRONICLE

July 23, 2002

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER SENTENCED FOR TAX EVASION.

A district court in Minsk on 23 July handed former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir a 3 1/2 year sentence suspended for two years and ordered him to pay back taxes of some $4,600 on money he earned while working in Moscow for a German firm, Belarusian and Western news agencies reported. The verdict also banned Chyhir from taking a leading position in a business for the next five years. "This is the personal revenge of [President Alyaksandr] Lukashenka because I joined the opposition," Chyhir said after the verdict. Chyhir, who served as prime minister between 1994-96, took part as a candidate in the opposition-organized presidential election in 1999 and supported opposition candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk in the 2001 presidential ballot. Chyhir spent seven months in prison in 1999 and was given a suspended sentence of three years in 2000 for abuse of office that the Supreme Court subsequently annulled. Chyhir said he will appeal the latest verdict. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 24, 2002)

August 14, 2002

PUTIN INVITES BELARUS TO FORM FEDERAL STATE...

Speaking at a Moscow press conference following talks with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka , President Vladimir Putin said that Russia and Belarus could create a unified federal state, beginning with a May 2003 referendum in both countries, strana.ru, RIA-Novosti, and other Russian news agencies reported on 15 August. Following the referendum, Putin said, both countries could elect a joint parliament in December 2003, introduce the Russian ruble as the union's single currency as of 1 January 2004, and in March 2004 elect a president of the new state. Putin also stressed that the functioning of the new state's institutions should be in accord with the Russian — rather than the Belarusian —Constitution. "This is because Belarus is a unitary state while Russia is a federation, and the new country will also be a federation," Putin noted. "The time is ripe, and the elites and the people of both states are ready for such a march of events" (RFE/RL Newsline, August 15, 2002)

August 15, 2002

ANALYST EXPLAINS PUTIN'S TACTICS.

Putin added, however, that if the Belarusian leadership is not ready to move so rapidly, unification could be "modeled on the European Union." In that case, the integration process should be taken up by the union's parliament. However, the countries of the EU have similar economies, while Russia and Belarus have very different ones and these differences will create problems, gazeta.ru reported Putin as saying. Andrei Ryabov, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, told *Izvestiya* on 14 August that Putin is using Belarus' isolated international and political situation to force Lukashenka to agree to a rigid unification model on Russia's terms. In doing so, Putin instantly transformed himself into the driving force of integration and Lukashenka into the "main dis-integrator," Ryabov continued. He added that if events proceed according to Putin's timeline, it will boost Putin's image during the 2004 Russian presidential campaign by portraying him as a "gatherer of the Slavic lands." (RFE/RL Newsline, August 15, 2002)

August 15, 2002

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT REJECTS PUTIN'S UNION REFERENDUM IDEA...

Upon returning to Minsk from Moscow on 14 August, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal that referendums be held in Belarus and Russia next year on the unification of the two countries into a single state on the basis of the Russian Constitution is "unacceptable to Belarus," Belarusian television reported. Lukashenka said, "If [one were] to translate [the Putin-proposed referendum question] into [plain] Russian, it will sound to Belarusians this way: 'Do you agree to dividing Belarus into seven parts, including these parts into the Russian Federation, and granting to these seven Belarusian parts equal rights with Russia's regions? What will Belarus' citizens answer? It is not hard to guess — [this will be] a categorical rejection, a categorical 'no.' Therefore, there is no sense in discussing this variant." (RFE/RL Newsline, Aug. 15, 2002)

Aug. 15, 2002

...PROPOSES TO 'SQUEEZE OUT' AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM UNION TREATY IN FORCE...

President Lukashenka said Belarus and Russia should make the most of their union treaty, which he signed with former Russian President Boris Yeltsin in December 1999. "Let us squeeze out as much as possible from the union treaty currently in force," Belarusian television quoted Lukashenka as saying at the Minsk airport. "Let us create such conditions for economic entities in which Belarusians in Russia and Russians in Belarus will not consider themselves foreigners. There are many problems laid out in the addendum to the treaty, which is called the program of action. It is an inseparable part of the treaty, and we have not yet met its provisions," he added. (RFE/RL Newsline, Aug. 15, 2002)

Aug. 15, 2002

...AND STRESSES BELARUS' SOVEREIGNTY IN CURRENCY UNION.

Referring to Putin's proposal to introduce the Russian ruble as the single currency of Russia and Belarus on 1 January 2004, one year ahead of the term stipulated by the union treaty, Lukashenka said it is a "difficult issue," Belarusian television reported. "This issue affects the sovereignty of [our] state," Lukashenka noted. "If the mechanism of functioning of the single currency is based on equal rights [of both states], let us introduce it even on 1 January 2003. But if there are unequal approaches [in Putin's proposal] — for instance, [Belarus'] National Bank has to become a branch of [Russia's] Central Bank — then we cannot accept such a variant," he said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Aug. 15, 2002)

August 23, 2002

TRADE UNION BOSS SLAMS BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT FOR 'DEAD' UNION WITH RUSSIA.

Alyaksandr Yarashuk, the head of the Trade Union of Workers of the Agro-Industrial Complex, told journalists on 23 August that the 1999 treaty on the creation of a Russia-Belarus Union state is "dead." Yarashuk accused Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of failing to integrate Belarus with Russia, Belapan reported. According to Yarashuk, there are "wide strata" of the Belarusian population for whom Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal to incorporate Belarus into the Russian Federation is "acceptable." Yarashuk proposed to launch a "broad social discussion" of the integration with Russia and invite Putin to Belarus to take part in legislative hearings devoted to this. Trade Union Federation leader Leanid Kozik commented that Yarashuk's pronouncements are "intrigues of the fifth column in our state" and accused him of intending "to split the Belarusian people." (RFE/RL Newsline, Aug. 26, 2002)

September 4, 2002

PUTIN URGES BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT TO RESPOND TO INTEGRATION PROPOSAL...

Russian President Vladimir Putin has sent a letter to his Belarusian counterpart Alyaksandr Lukashenka assuring him that the development of integration with Belarus remains a priority task for the Kremlin, Russian and Belarusian media reported. The letter was passed to Lukashenka by Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loschinin on 4 September in Minsk. Putin reportedly confirmed in his letter that Moscow sees three possible integration scenarios: a full merger of Russia and Belarus into a single state, a suprastate formation like the European Union, and unification on the basis of the 1999 union treaty. Putin proposed to set up a joint team to analyze these three integration models.

Putin also said he is waiting for Lukashenka's answer to his offer on 14 August to introduce the Russian ruble as the single currency for Belarus and Russia as of 1 January 2004. (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept. 5, 2002)

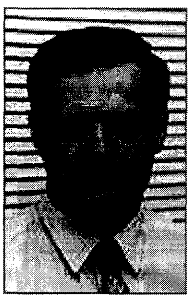
September 7, 2002
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT REJECTS PUTIN'S OFFER TO MULL INTEGRATION SCENARIOS...

Alyaksandr Lukashenka told journalists on 7 September that he sees no need to form a team of experts to study the three scenarios for Belarusian-Russian integration as proposed recently in a letter by Russian President Vladimir Putin , Belarusian media reported. "Those who prepared the letter — maybe it was Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] himself --appear to have forgotten that we already have a Belarusian-Russian joint group, which, according to the [1999 union] treaty, is working on an act that would determine the way of building the union state," Lukashenka said. (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept. 9, 2002)

Sept. 12, 2002
TRADERS STRIKE, DEMAND BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT'S OUSTER.

Valery Levaneuski, the chairman of the strike committee of Belarusian outdoor-market traders, told Belapan on 12 September that some 110,000 vendors throughout Belarus took part in a strike the previous day. The protesters, apart from demands to reduce the administrative and financial pressure on small businesses, also demanded that President Lukashenka resign. "For the last eight years Alyaksandr Ryhoravich [Lukashenka] has engaged us in idle talks. He promises to meet traders halfway, but in actual fact he stifles them. What do we need such a president for?" Levaneuski told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service. (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept. 12, 2002)

September 16, 2002
BELARUSIAN EDITOR GETS TWO-YEAR SENTENCE FOR LIBELING LUKASHENKA


Viktar Ivaškievič

A district court in Minsk on 16 September sentenced Viktar Ivashkevich, the editor in chief of the independent newspaper *Rabochy*, to two years of "restriction of freedom" in a corrective-labor facility for libeling President Alyaksandr Lukashenka prior to the 9 September 2001 presidential election, BelaPAN reported. Ivashkevich's trial was conducted behind closed doors. "The verdict is absolutely politically motivated, because my newspaper reported on [true] facts that testified to the president's illegal activities," Ivashkevich told the news agency. "The journalist's profession is becoming dangerous in Belarus," he added. (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept. 16, 2002)

October 5, 2002
BELARUSIAN NGOS HOLD CONGRESS

A congress of the Assembly of Democratic Nongovernmental Organizations in Minsk on 5-6 October elected 26 NGO leaders and activists to the assembly's "working group," Belapan reported. This group will reportedly be expanded with representatives of those NGOs that were unable to take part in the congress. The congress ended with the adoption of a resolution on human rights and civil society in Belarus, and of a statement in defense of the country's independence. Some raised objections to the validity of resolutions adopted during the congress, arguing that 190 delegates attended the forum on its first day and only 64 on the second. The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAZh) called on NGOs at the congress to participate in the collection of signatures for a BAZh petition to annul the Criminal Code's articles that penalize the slandering and insulting of the president and other government officials.(RFE/RL Newsline, Oct. 7, 2002)

Culture & Society

Writers Refuse to Bow to the Authorities

By Jan Maksymiuk

Belarusian writers elected 30-year-old novelist Ales (Alyaksandr) Pashkevich as chairman of the Union of Belarusian Writers (SBP) at their extraordinary congress in Minsk on 24 September, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported.

The congress was reportedly initiated by a group of writers who wanted to replace the prior SBP leadership with a more compliant one that could provide a sort of intellectual support to the authoritarian policies of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. This attempt, judging by comments from some participants in the congress, failed. Volha Ipatava, the previous chairwoman of the SBP, said the election of Pashkevich was a "victory of the democratic forces among the literary community."

But there were also other voices — particularly from the younger generation of Belarusian writers who do not belong to the SBP — that said the above-mentioned "victory" is quite insignificant since the SBP's influence on the current literary process in the country is very small or even "illusory."

"Our realities show that a democratic writer cannot cooperate with the current government," Ipatava told the congress prior to the election. She accused the government of introducing censorship in the SBP's weekly *Litaratura i Mastatstva* and seizing control of the SBP's literary periodicals *Polymya, Maladosts, Krynitsa,* and *Neman* by appointing loyal people to head their staffs and banning publication of materials selected by the previous editors. Earlier this year, the above-mentioned five periodicals became part of a state-controlled "literary holding" called "Litaratura i Mastatstva" (Literature and Art).

Ipatava linked the government's hostile actions regarding the SBP to the fact that the organization of writers has never filled the place that the government assigned to it in Belarus's social and political system after the 2001 presidential election.

The congress was attended by 292 SBP members out of a total of 501. Pashkevich received 159 votes, while his rival, Uladzimir Lipski, got 118. "Pashkevich is a talented, dynamic, mobile, and highly intellectual figure," poet Leanid Dranko-Maysyuk commented after the election. "His character combines traits of a manager, soldier, and diplomat."

Translator Lyavon Barshcheuski said the congress's most positive result was that the SBP "has remained the most Belarusian and most responsible organization among all other creative unions" in Belarus. Barshcheuski elaborated: "The main [underlying] principle of the SBP is the understanding that the preservation of the Belarusian language is an indisputable question. Any authority that will try to

deprive writers of their mother tongue and of their social influence in this sphere will not be supported by the absolute majority of SBP members. This is what actually took place at the congress, despite the fact that the creation of the so-called 'literary holding' was a move to lure a part of the SBP into taking the side of the authorities. Writers did not agree and said [at the congress] that they will be looking for nonstate support to publish their works and will not beg for money from the state, which hates the Belarusian language and does not give a damn about the national culture."

Adam Hlobus, a Belarusian writer who made his debut in 1988 within the Soviet-era organization of writers but in independent Belarus published his books outside the SBP publishing system, told RFE/RL that the SBP has largely lost its sway on the literary community in comparison with its Soviet-era predecessor. "Earlier, the union granted honorary titles [to writers] or made it possible [for them] to be published. Now, only an illusion remains, as there still has been the illusion that, so to speak, 'We will restore the Soviet Union.' This is not an illusion of my generation.... [The older generations of writers] still believe that the SBP may be a tool to influence activities of the people who are responsible for creating national and state ideology," Hlobus said.

The nonstate weekly *Nasha Niva*, which provides a publicity forum for younger generations of Belarusian authors, commented sarcastically that the best thing Pashkevich could do "for the benefit of the national literature" would be "to break up" the SBP. According to *Nasha Niva*, the SBP, which boasts of its status as a democratic organization, still thinks it has "the monopolist right to represent the entire [body of] national literature."

Source: *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, 1 October 2002.*

"COMPATRIOTS OF UNIDENTIFIED NATIONALITY"

The new national law will apply this definition to Belarusians with a permanent foreign residence. The international public organization "World Association of Belarusians *Batkauschina*" believes that the passage of the new draft law on the "countrymen living abroad" will produce a dissent among the Belarusian community. The press-release reads that most of the Belarusians, living abroad, are categorically opposed to being identified as "compatriots of unidentified nationality". According to the Association, using the aforementioned definition instead of the term "Belarusian" will deny the national identity right to 1million Belarusians, living in Bielastok, Vilnia (Vilnius), Latgalia and Smolensk regions. Moreover, the document completely ignores over 200 Belarusian public organizations, actively operating in 73 countries. They also claim that the state draft law doesn't pay attention to the specifics of life of the Belarusian diaspora in different countries of the globe. In this connection the Association addressed the Belarusian community with a request to "assist in passing an effective law, aimed at the solution of problems, faced by the Belarusians, living abroad, and creation of conditions for strengthening their ties with homeland in order to attract their great potential for the development of Belarus".

Source; Charter97 Press Center, 2 September 2002

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Payback Continues Unabated (*The Washington Post*, "Belarus Chief Responds to Critics With Crackdown," by Susan B. Glasser, August 18, 2001) —The crackdown on all those who dared oppose Lukashenko in the last presidential election is reported to be in a new and highly energized phase of operation. It is appears from the reporting in this article that what is happening is not just payback for being on "the wrong side" in the last election; but also a long-term operation of repression and attrition against the democratic opposition. The means to this end are familiar to all. Zhanna Litvina, president of the Belarusian Association of Journalists is quoted: "For seven years, under this same president, we never suffered as much as this year," and "We are being paid back for our position during the presidential election. Lukashenko promised revenge, and now he is carrying it out."

The author reports that Lukashenka is an equal-opportunity oppressor; his wrath his seen to be targeted at a variety of high and low profile entities and persons, from McDonald's restaurants — to European diplomats — to members of the youth movement "Zubr" — to journalists, and the newspaper *Pahonia.* More incidents of beatings and physical intimidation are reported.

The author points out that with the world's attention directed away from Belarus because of the War on Terrorism, Lukashenka is taking advantage of the fact that the world is not looking to act with free reign and extraordinary brutality against the opposition. Also covered in the article is the case of the severe beating of Goncharik's campaign manager, the libel suits against *Pahonia*, Putin's policy shift and the increased isolation of Lukashenka, and the possible acceptance of Lithuania and Latvia into NATO. Quotes from Yuri Khaschevatsky and Andrei Sannikau are provided. As if to emphasize the depth of the obstacles to reform that exist in Belarus the author provides this quote from Information Minister Mikhail Podgainy: "We have no problem with freedom of speech in Belarus."

Who dares say that the Emperor has no clothes? (*Financial Times*, "Stagnation and Intimidation Undermine Belarus", September 26, 2002) — The article uses the confrontation between Alexander Silich, editor of Narodnaya Volya and Lukashenka to illustrate the shakiness of the latter's pedestal. When Silich asked about a rumour about the existence of a presidential "slush fund", the president's reaction was tantamount to pulling the lever to the trap door beneath Silich's feet. But, as the articles intimates, such reactions and the stepped-up harassment of journalists, among others, is seen by at least some as a sign of a realization by the regime that they are losing their grip on control of Belarus and Belarusian affairs. The article cites a loss of confidence among foreign investors and companies that have been trying to make a go-of-it in Belarus. Ditto the IMF and the OSCE. Now Silich can see storm clouds rumbling up Skaryny Boulevard towards his newspaper offices.

Readers Write

Russian Annexation

Dear Sirs:

I have been reading with great interest your opinions regarding the latest developments in the "negotiations" between Lukashenko and Putin regarding the future of Belarus. As an American married to a Belarusian woman and having a Belarusian son and my wife's parents living with me, and my wife's brother still in Belarus, I have an interest in this subject.

I have seen first hand what life is like in Belarus. I went there for the first time in 1996 and then again in 1998. In those two years I noticed a marked degradation in living conditions as well as everything else, including the people's attitudes. It is absolutely clear to me that Mr. Lukashenko is the overriding cause of this, and it is also quite clear that there is little that the people of Belarus can do to stop him, save a revolution. That revolution is not likely forthcoming, because Mr. Lukashenko does an incredible job of conning the older generation into believing that the "old ways" are the best, while at the same time the younger generation, once hopeful for real and continuing change for the better are now disillusioned to the point of hopelessness.

Now, I understand why Belarusians want their freedom and independence. However, it is unlikely to ever come as long as Mr. Lukashenko is around and it is most likely the next leader will be one of Mr. Lukashenko's chosen ones. It is also true that once annexed by Russia, there is little hope for independence ever. However, Belarus needs help NOW!

There IS no future for any living Belarusians today, save the ones who manage to get out. I believe Mr. Putin would ensure that Mr. Lukashenko would disappear into the dustbin of history. Life might not be much better under the Russian rule, but at least there would be some hope for decent living in the future for young Belarusians, and some stability for the older ones.

Keep in mind that Mr. Lukashenko would not go for anything that would leave him out in the cold as to future political aspirations. One can only hope that Mr. Lukashenko will see the light and discover that he has a path for his future if he reverses what he's done to date and leans toward the West for support.

11 Sept. 2002

James R. Zieche
Everett, Washington

BELARUSIAN REVIEW (ISSN 1064-7716)
Published by Belarusan-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal non-profit association

Editor George Stankevich
Editor-At-Large Joe Arciuch
Contributing Editors Alec Danilovich, Paul Goble, Taras Kuzio, Jan Maksymiuk, David Marples, Mikalaj Packajeu, Joe Price, Vera Rich, Jan Zaprudnik
Copy Editor Joe Pecevich
Y. Kosarzhevsky and Steve Stankievich helped preparing this issue
Production George Stankevich, Stsiapan Vinakurau
Web site Administrator Andrej Ramaszeuski

Publisher Walter Stankievich
Administration Alex Silwanowicz
Circulation Serge Tryhubovich
Treasurer Kacia Reznikova

U.S.A. BELARUSIAN REVIEW
P.O. Box 1347, Highland Park, N.J. 08904
E-mail: belarusianreview@hotmail.com
Tel/fax: 732 222 1951

Europe BELARUSIAN REVIEW
Malesicka ul. 553/65
108 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic
E-mail: jirstan@login.cz
Tel/fax: (420) 2 7477 1338

BELARUSIAN REVIEW is registered in Europe with Czech Ministry of Culture
Registration No. MK ČR E 13311
Publication Date: October 18, 2002
Printed by: AK REPRO, V Jámě 1, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic
Annual subscription rate in 2002:
$45 for individuals, $65 for institutions
payable by check or money order in US funds
to: BELARUSIAN REVIEW or BR
P.O. Box 1347, Highland Park, N.J. 08904, USA
ON-LINE: www.belarusianreview.org